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DEVELOPMENT OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION POLICY FOR COUNTERING ISIS RECRUITMENT IN THE UNITED STATES: LESSONS FOR THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

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by

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The comparative research investigates differences between the United States and Azerbaijan's applications of strategic communications to counter terrorist recruiting. The key differences lie in cultural and religious narratives as well as target audiences. The U.S. Constitution formally protects freedom of speech and freedom of religion, and the anti-terrorism strategic communications of the U.S. government do not generally target a domestic audience. Azerbaijan formally and informally protects historically established religious traditions, insofar as those traditions guarantee non-violence. This requires regulation of religious freedom by Azerbaijani policy makers. These differences are due not only to the religious dissimilarity between the countries but also to institutional legacies. Whereas the United States has prioritized the freedom of expression in its organization of strategic communications, the government of Azerbaijan has constructed narratives of multiculturalism countering religious radicalization. The lessons from how U.S. institutions emphasize freedom of expression in their strategic communications to counter terrorist recruiting may help Azerbaijan boost the effectiveness of its domestic propaganda. This research uses concepts from counterterrorism, communications, political science, history, and sociology, and draws from academic literature, policy documents, and media materials in English, Azerbaijani, and Russian.

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ABSTRACT

The comparative research investigates differences between the United States and Azerbaijan's applications of strategic communications to counter terrorist recruiting. The key differences lie in cultural and religious narratives as well as target audiences. The U.S. Constitution formally protects freedom of speech and freedom of religion, and the anti-terrorism strategic communications of the U.S. government do not generally target a domestic audience. Azerbaijan formally and informally protects historically established religious traditions, insofar as those traditions guarantee non-violence. This requires regulation of religious freedom by Azerbaijani policy makers. These differences are due not only to the religious dissimilarity between the countries but also to institutional legacies. Whereas the United States has prioritized the freedom of expression in its organization of strategic communications, the government of Azerbaijan has constructed narratives of multiculturalism countering religious radicalization. The lessons from how U.S. institutions emphasize freedom of expression in their strategic communications to counter terrorist recruiting may help Azerbaijan boost the effectiveness of its domestic propaganda. This research uses concepts from counterterrorism, communications, political science, history, and sociology, and draws from academic literature, policy documents, and media materials in English, Azerbaijani, and Russian.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CC CPA	Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan
CC CPSU	Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CPI	Committee on Public Information
CSCC	Center of Strategic Counterterrorism Communications
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism
DoD	Department of Defense
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigations
GEC	Global Engagement Center
HUAC	House un-American Activities Committee
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OCP	Office for Community Partnerships
OPE	Office of Partner Engagement
OWI	Office of War Information

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I. INTRODUCTION

The World Wars and regional conflicts of the 20th century have contributed to the emergence of the new realm of confrontation between people—ideas. During the two World Wars, in addition to their opposing armies, large states furnished themselves with narratives and competed for control over the dissemination of information domestically and internationally. Unacceptable costs of a direct military confrontation between the nuclear superpowers of the Cold War made a war of ideas their favored arena of global confrontation. In the course of the 20th century, newly emerged nation-states also attempted to use narratives targeting domestic audiences, pursuant to mobilization goals. Following the patterns set by the superpowers and smaller states, terrorists also adopted propaganda use, and in the 21st century elaborated their narratives with the aim of recruiting supporters. Eventually, the War on Terror, a narrative in and of itself, has called for large and small nation-states to apply their ideological strength in order to protect their populations from the contamination of ideas hostile to humanity.

Especially after the emergence of the terrorist organization of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the enemy changed its nature. ISIS used the inspirational power of radical ideas and borderless communication technologies to recruit supporters and create terrorists within nation-states. Therefore, this thesis is concerned with these processes of organizing to counter terrorists' recruitment through the application of strategic communications. The freedom of expression accepts promotion of radical ideas, unless they encourage committing violence. At the same time, democracies tend to disapprove of domestic strategic communications by governments. However, when terrorists' propaganda of radicalism targets domestic audiences, governments may need to counter that message with their own strategic communications. Government narratives countering radicalization may even anchor democratic values. In fact, civil societies might eventually support governments' strategic communications targeting domestic audiences to counter terrorists' recruitment propaganda.

A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

Over time, Islamic terrorists have developed more sophisticated propaganda activities aimed at the recruitment of new members. ISIS has stood out among other terrorist organizations

for its skillful use of propaganda that results in successful recruitment. The United States has therefore developed a range of strategic communications to counter terrorists' propaganda. At the same time, the Republic of Azerbaijan has also faced the challenge of recruitment by radical Islamic organizations. This thesis asks how and why the United States and the Republic of Azerbaijan vary in their application of strategic communications in countering terrorist recruitment. This research highlights opportunities for governments to strengthen their counterterrorism policies.

B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Islamist terrorists have marked the Republic of Azerbaijan because of its geopolitical, social, and religious significance. Starting with the late 1990s, the government of Azerbaijan has been actively struggling against the spread of the Islamic religious radicalism, which was mainly introduced through the infiltration of Arab humanitarian relief organizations in the country, as well as stimulated by Azerbaijan's proximity to the Northern Caucasus Islamic insurgency.[1] The development of modern communication technologies often allows Islamic terrorist propaganda to reach groups of Azerbaijan's population vulnerable to religious radicalism due to tenuous social conditions, weak literacy, and lack of critical thinking. During the last five years, terrorists have succeeded in attracting more than 900 Azerbaijani citizens to join ISIS.[2] In this period, Azerbaijan has adopted a variety of prohibitive measures against the radical Salafi ideology and has simultaneously attempted to promote enlightenment concepts countering radical Islam. But Salafi followers continuously search for different media to spread their propaganda, and their presence in cyberspace has grown.[3] A response to radical propaganda requires a coordination of communication activities, trustworthy narratives, and the participation of a wider public; yet, this response is not addressed systematically in the region.

[1] Rufat Sattarov, *Islam, State, and Society in Independent Azerbaijan: Between Historical Legacy and Post-Soviet Reality with Special Reference to Baku and Its Environs* (Germany, Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2009), 132.

[2] Azad Hasanli and Anvar Mammadov, "Azerbaijan Checking Number of Its Women, Children in Camps in Iraq," Trend, last modified October, 30, 2017, https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/society/2814504.html.

[3] Kamal Gasimov, "Multimodal Salafi Engagement with Digital Media in Azerbaijan" (CAP Papers 195, July 2017), http://centralasiaprogram.org/archives/10835.

In its propaganda targeting recruitment, ISIS benefits from global supporters, as well as its ability to create and spread messages over wider socio-geographical borders. Western and Arab counterterrorism officials believe that despite the loss of territories, ISIS still preserves capabilities for recruiting followers around the world and is strategically using communication to inspire "lone wolf" terrorists.[4] Brian Michael Jenkins points out that the progression from inspiration to radicalization, and then from recruitment to jihad, is not necessarily a whole process,[5] leaving the opportunity for one to disengage from it. Governments' strategic communications countering ISIS propaganda may be of help to disrupt terrorists' recruitment process.

The United States has employed strategic communications during wars and crises (such as the Civil War, World War I, World War II, and the Cold War), but legislators dismantled these activities during peace because they were not confident in the people's acceptance of the government's role in such manipulative communication.[6] The need to counter radical ideologies leading to homegrown religious extremism raised the question about the compatibility of government use of strategic communications domestically and the freedom of expression. American institutions—inter alia the Department of Defense (DoD), Department of State (State Department), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the U.S. intelligence community, the National Security Council and others—deal with aspects of wider strategic communications in their specific fields of competence.[7] When ISIS actively exploits propaganda to recruit new supporters among residents of Western countries, the correct response may be arranging for one specific governmental institution to coordinate strategic communications in countering terrorists' propaganda.

In Azerbaijan, policy makers have adopted a variety of legislative measures in response to religious radicalization. Article 18 of the Constitution of Azerbaijan states that: "religion is

[4] Margaret Coker, Eric Schmitt, and Rukmini Callimachi, "With Loss of Its Caliphate, ISIS May Return to Guerrilla Roots," *New York Times*, October 18, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/18/world/middleeast/islamic-state-territory-attacks.html.

[5] Brian Michael Jenkins, "Stray Dogs and Virtual Armies: Radicalization and Recruitment to Jihadist Terrorism in the United States since 9/11" (occasional paper, RAND, 2011), 17, https://www.rand.org/pubs/occasional_papers/OP343.html.

[6] Christopher Paul, *Strategic Communications: Origins, Concepts, and Current Debates* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2011), 79.

[7] Paul, *Strategic Communications,* 84–110.

separated from the state; propaganda of religions humiliating people's dignity and contradicting the principles of humanism is prohibited; and state education system is secular."[8] Moreover, legislative measures include the compulsory registration of religious communities, strict regulation of distribution of religious materials and ban on religious propaganda of non-citizens.[9] Azerbaijan's law enforcement agencies' counterterrorism measures are focused on prosecutions, arrests, and special operations.[10] Meanwhile, the State Committee on Work with Religious Associations conducts religious regulations, engaging the non-governmental organization (NGO) the Administration of the Caucasus Muslims with regard to Islam related issues. In addition to that, several ministries and state committees have responsibilities of disseminating inter alia narratives countering radicalization among particular groups of citizens, such as youth, women, sportsmen, students, and others. Azerbaijan has its own concept of domestic propaganda in general, but the application of strategic communications in countering terrorists' recruitment propaganda is new for the country.

Countering propaganda for radicalization and recruitment in its embryonic stage may critically contribute to overall counterterrorism activities. The multitude of Azerbaijan's traditions provides a solid basis relative to the creation of wider narratives to counter Islamic radicalism. Yet, the lack of advanced tools of strategic communications at the disposal of its government represents a serious challenge in the face of ISIS's skillful approach to its propaganda.

The results of this research will be of use to a variety of institutions in Azerbaijan dealing with countering terrorism and of particular interest to those focused on countering radicalization and violent extremism. This research considers ethics and democratic restrictions on governments that target perceptions of their own populations through counterterrorist communication. Furthermore, the research attempts to identify ways of sharing the processes and practices related

[8] "The Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan," Portal Azerbaijan.az, accessed March 28, 2018, http://azerbaijan.az/portal/General/Constitution/doc/constitution_e.pdf.

[9] According to the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On freedom of religious beliefs only religious literature and audio/video and other materials revised and marked by the state are allowed to be disseminated"; and "non-Azerbaijani citizens are prohibited from conducting Islamic religious ceremonies and divine services" (see more at: http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/7649).

[10] U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2016—Azerbaijan*, July 19, 2017, http://www.refworld.org/docid/5981e45313.html.

to strategic communications that are possible and desirable.[11] By explaining the American experience to the interested professional spheres in Azerbaijan, the research also contributes to setting a basis for the international coordination of strategic communications countering the propaganda of violent extremism to be beneficial for all parties involved.

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

The relevant literature has been assessed in order to answer the question of how and why the United States and Azerbaijan vary in their application of strategic communications countering terrorists' recruitment. The resultant literature review presents cluster information according to the following themes: strategic communications and propaganda, narratives, radicalization and violent extremism, terrorist propaganda and countering terrorist propaganda for recruitment.

On a general level, the literature points out that the application of strategic communications by governments is a legitimate policy. Furthermore, the research shows that there is no general approach to the institutional framework of domestic strategic communications. Moreover, legislators challenge strategic communications by restricting the deliberate dissemination of information among domestic audiences. Finally, the literature review reveals that an effective narrative for countering terrorist recruitment propaganda needs solid theological knowledge about Islam.

1. Strategic Communications and Propaganda

In the consulted literature, there are a number of definitions of strategic communications as well as attempts to replace it with military terminology. Among a variety of definitions, the most general one comes from James Forest, who asserts that strategic communications "refers to communication that is driven primarily by a strategy for influencing human thought, emotion, and behavior."[12] Although it encompasses a broad spectrum, this definition lacks some deeper understanding of strategic communications. Christopher Paul finds confusing the usage of the word "strategic" because it resides not only at the strategic level. On the contrary, Paul defines

[11] Paul, *Strategic Communications*, 167.

[12] James J. F. Forest, "The Democratic Disadvantage in the Strategic Communications Battlespace," *Democracy and Security* 2, no. 1 (January 2006): 78, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17419160600623467.

strategic communications as "coordinated actions, messages, images, and other forms of signaling or engagement intended to inform, influence, or persuade selected audiences in support of national objectives."[13] He adds that coordination is needed to avoid discord, and actions are needed to support communication. Paul summarizes the contentious character of the debates about the replacement or interchangeable usage of the terms strategic communications and public diplomacy. He agrees with Matt Armstrong that strategic communications and public diplomacy have different goals; the latter is characterized by its passive approach and concerned with engagement and improving a particular perception.[14] The White House National Framework for Strategic Communications defines the term quite precisely as "the synchronization of words and deeds and how they will be perceived by selected audiences, as well as programs and activities deliberately aimed at communicating and engaging with intended audiences, including those implemented by public affairs, public diplomacy, and information operation professionals."[15] As it emphasizes the role of different actors who implement the strategy, this thesis uses the White House's definition.

The concept of strategic communications developed in the shadow of conventional warfare and was originally intended to constitute a decisive policy in defeating an adversary. Following the concept's evolution, Haroro Ingram suggests that humans historically exploited strategic communications as a component of warfare, though its importance has been increasing.[16] He assumes that the nuclear era gradually made a battle of ideas between superpowers the only alternative to an all-destroying conflict. Both of the two superpowers recognized for themselves rights to target the population of the other by deliberate information. The U.S. Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948 (the Smith–Mundt Act) granted that right to the U.S. State Department. The Soviet Union conducted sophisticated communication activities in which all the ideas originated from the Communist ideology, but the ones addressing foreign audiences differed

[13] Paul, *Strategic Communications*, 3, 32.

[14] Paul, *Strategic Communications*, 75.

[15] White House, *National Framework for Strategic Communications*, Washington, DC, March 2010, https://fas.org/man/eprint/pubdip.pdf.

[16] Haroro Ingram, "A Brief History of Propaganda during Conflict: Lessons for Counter-Terrorism Strategic Communications," *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague* 7, no. 4 (2016), 20. http://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/ICCT-Haroro-Ingram-Brief-History-Propaganda-June-2016-3.pdf.

from those intended for the Soviet Union's own population.[17] Furthermore, in 1982, President Ronald Reagan predicted that not military but ideological superiority would determine the winner of the Cold War.[18] During his presidency, in 1983, the National Security Decision Directive outlined U.S. strategic communications as a "comprehensive strategy—integrating politico-military, economic and information efforts."[19] The related part of the Directive is called "Political Action"; it highlights the importance of dominating ideological thrust and consists of exposure of Soviet weaknesses and prevention of Soviet propaganda. Actually, the Directive specified an ideal front of confrontation with the Soviet Union where the costs were not as high as in nuclear conflict, yet the benefits promised unconditional victory.

In the post-Cold War period, conventional military forces faced a new adversary—international terrorism—changing the paradigm of warfare. Within the last decade, the threats of homegrown extremism, pervasive propaganda, and recruitment within the United States have grown from "lower than [in] Western Europe" in 2009[20] to "the most frequent and unpredictable threat to the United States" in 2017.[21] The propaganda of violent extremism undermines the utility of regular military power itself. Within the debate over the importance of countering propaganda, Christopher Paul argues that in order to counter violent extremism the targets' extremist worldviews have to be taken into consideration.[22] These goals cannot be achieved through purely military means. Correspondingly, strategic communications have become a part of the U.S. government's wider counterterrorism policy.

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[17] Katri Pynnöniemi and András Rácz, *Fog of Falsehood: Russian Strategy of Deception and the Conflict in Ukraine* (Helsinki, Finland: FIIA, 2016), http://www.fiia.fi/assets/publications/FIIAReport45_FogOfFalsehood.pdf.

[18] "Address to Members of the British Parliament," Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. June 8, 1982, last accessed April 7, 2018, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/archives/speeches/1982/60882a.htm.

[19] White House, *U.S. Relations with the USSR*, NSDD 75 (Washington, DC: White House, 1983). https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd/nsdd-75.pdf.

[20] *Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community, Testimony before Select Committee on Intelligence,* U.S. Senate, February 12, 2009 (statement for the record, Danis C. Blair, Director of National Intelligence), https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Testimonies/20090212_testimony.pdf.

[21] *Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community, Testimony before Select Committee on Intelligence*, U.S. Senate, May 11, 2017 (statement for the record, Daniel R. Coats, Director of National Intelligence), https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Testimonies/SSCI%20Unclassified%20SFR%20-%20Final.pdf.

[22] Paul, *Strategic Communications,* 1.

Various scholars and American policy makers agree that strategic communications and propaganda are not the same, though they have some similarities. The National Security Decision Directive of 1983 distinguishes between strategic communications and propaganda by naming its own activity a strategy. While naming the Soviet's propaganda, it emphasizes the negative meaning of the latter. There is a culturally based disagreement among scholars about whether the word "propaganda" has a negative or neutral meaning. Paul points out that in English-speaking environments it generally has a strong negative impression, while in Latin countries its meaning is neutral.[23] However, Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell consider that the word propaganda has lost its neutrality.[24] They describe propaganda as communication with pre-selected content, aimed at promoting propagandists' attitudes. Moreover, they suggest propaganda implies dishonesty, manipulation of cognition, and misrepresentation, with poor or non-existent reasoning. Meanwhile, Thomas Johnson emphasizes the large role of propaganda in information operations by stating that it is a "specific type of message aimed directly at influencing opinions of people, rather than impartially providing information."[25] Scholars agree that propaganda is about manipulation of information. Paul cites Dennis Murphy, who also says that propaganda selects information with little concern for truth or context, and communication activities do not by themselves constitute propaganda.[26] He further summarizes a variety of scholars arguing that manipulating or lying, both of which may be a characteristic of propaganda, undermine the credibility of the communicator. The weakness of propaganda is that it is usually based on falsifications and manipulation. Arguably, the separation of propaganda from strategic communications becomes possible based on judgments about whether the information is true or false. During a conflict, judgments may be conflicting as well, eventually leading to naming one government's activity as strategic communications while the adversary's propaganda. In this case, a narrative targeting own audiences can easily argue that the adversary's propaganda is doomed to distrust just as its roots are revealed.

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[23] Paul, *Strategic Communications,* 44.

[24] Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2015), 2–3, 7.

[25] Thomas Johnson, *Taliban Narratives: The Use and Power of Stories In The Afghanistan Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 35.

[26] Paul, *Strategic Communications,* 28, 46.

In Azerbaijan, unlike the United States, the term "strategic communications" has no real meaning. In Azerbaijani, the term *təbliğat*[27] is used to explain the spread of ideas among people. It carries a neutral meaning and is most literally translated into English as popularization or propaganda.[28] Thus, for Azerbaijan, the broader definition of propaganda is appropriate, such as "honest and forthright communication intended to advance a cause through enlightenment, persuasion, or a dedicated sense of mission," and "propaganda is legitimate persuasion."[29] The governmental institutions of Azerbaijan use *təbliğat* to describe their promotion of Azerbaijani culture, the promotion of tourism in Azerbaijan, or the propaganda of patriotism among youth.

In terms of how to make strategic communications successful, the literature indicates few approaches. Ingram defines four principles of successful strategic communications campaigns:

- Produces a diversity of messaging that leverages rational- and identity-choice appeals, which are deployed both defensively and offensively (with an emphasis on the latter);
- Consists of messaging held together by some core themes or, ideally, a grand narrative;
- Uses various means of communication to maximize the message's reach, timeliness, and targeting;
- Is calibrated to maximize the desired effects of one's own strategic-policy/politico-military efforts and nullify the effects of the adversary's activities. [30]

Another point of success is noticed by Murphy who cautions not to confuse strategic communications with interaction with media only; he states that there are several forms of

[27] Təbliğat can be most closely spelled in English as Teblighat.

[28] Azerbaijani Explanatory dictionary, s.v. "təbliğat," accessed March 20, 2017, https://azerdict.com/english/təbliğat.

[29] Bertrand Canfield and Frazier Moore, *Public Relations: Principles, Cases, and Problems* (Homewood, IL: Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1973), 41.

[30] Ingram, "A Brief History of Propaganda during Conflict," 35–36.

communications, including words, pictures, and deeds.[31] Nonetheless, the measurement of successful strategic communications is controversial, and the literature consulted does not offer a unified vision of an achieved consensus.

2. Narratives

The definition of narratives is broad and includes features specific to their understanding in line with various disciplines and occupations. In his book, *Taliban Narratives,* Johnson touches how differently writers; screenwriters; scholars in anthropology, communication, and psychology; military professionals; and eventually terrorists understand the concepts of narrative and stories. The following includes the most important features of a narrative with regard to this thesis: "narratives are an important arsenal of cultural ammunition that helps to cultivate doctrine supporting morale and spirit"; "narratives are stories that reflect foundational beliefs that articulate a group's views toward the world"; "narrative is a scheme by means of which human beings give meaning to their experience of temporality and personal actions"; "narratives may embody basic dogmas that clearly frame a group's opinion on a matter"; "narrative is a system of stories that hang together and provide a coherent view of the world," and "if shared orally, narratives may reach the literate and illiterate."[32] Moreover, Cristina Archetti summarizes several scholars who point out that narratives are "the means through which people connect their past and present together," and "narratives were central to the construction of identity."[33] The better understanding of various aspects of a narrative's definition may help in its tailoring to a target audience and is necessary for its effective use in a war of ideas against religious radicalization and violent extremism.

Naturally, narratives are important in several aspects of terrorist activity as well. So, scholars have examined ways to counter terrorist organizations with the help of narratives. For instance, research has found that ISIS adjusted images from contemporary popular culture, video

[31] Dennis Murphy, "The Trouble with Strategic Communications(s)" (issue paper 2–08, Center for Strategic Leadership, 2008), 1–2, https://csl.armywarcollege.edu/usacsl/publications/IP2-08TheTroubleWithStrategicCommunication(s).pdf.

[32] Johnson, *Taliban Narratives*, 2017, 2–3, 8.

[33] Cristina Archetti, "Narrative Wars: Understanding Terrorism in the Era of Global Interconnectedness," in *Forging the World: Strategic Narratives and International Relations*, ed. Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin, and Laura Roselle (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018), 221.

games, and films to its narratives targeting a young global audience with the aims of recruitment.[34] Furthermore, scholars recognize the effectiveness of the Taliban's narratives aiming at the recruitment of supporters.[35] At the same time, the terrorist organization needs effective narratives to inspire those who are already members. For example, Lawrence Freedman insists on the importance of radical Islam's narratives in holding terrorist cells together.[36] As he suggests, a good understanding of a narrative may help to undermine it and thus to unbind radical groups. With regard to countering the Taliban's narratives, Johnson suggests using narratives from the Pashtuns' traditions, which could deprive terrorists of the rural population's support.[37] He proposes a concept of engaging in an ideological struggle between moderate and radical Islamists, as well as studying the Taliban's vulnerabilities in order to work on a strategy to counter radical Islamic narratives in a different part of the world. Paul would agree by saying that to use (or compete with) narratives, one has to consider the prevailing cultural narratives, understandings, and descriptions of various events.[38] Similarly, Javier Lesaca, after evaluating some successful U.S. strategic communications campaigns, proposes that narratives countering ISIS propaganda should anchor the authentic Islamic stories.[39] In a war of ideas against terrorism, governments require a better fundamental examination of an adversary's narratives to find their weaknesses and an effective elaboration of own.

Depending on the goals of strategic communications a narrative might be of a different nature. Paul calls the spreading of one's own narratives fundamentally positive strategic communications, while he regards the countering of an adversary's narratives as fundamentally negative.[40] He states that pursuing different goals requires diverse tools. Indeed, strategic

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[34] Javier Lesaca, "On Social Media, ISIS Uses Modern Cultural Images to Spread Anti-modern Values," *Brookings Institution*, September 24, 2015, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/techtank/2015/09/24/on-social-media-isis-uses-modern-cultural-images-to-spread-anti-modern-values/.

[35] Ingram, "A Brief History of Propaganda during Conflict," 26.

[36] Lawrence Freedman, "Chapter 5. Strategic Communications," *The Adelphi Papers* 45, no. 379 (November 2006): 85–87, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/05679320600661715.

[37] Johnson, *Taliban Narratives,* 15–16, 35.

[38] Paul, *Strategic Communications,* 163.

[39] Javier Lesaca, "Fight against ISIS Reveals Power of Social Media," *Brookings Institution*, November 19, 2015, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/techtank/2015/11/19/fight-against-isis-reveals-power-of-social-media/.

[40] Paul, *Strategic Communications,* 59.

communications to counter radical Islamic propaganda requires trustworthy and offensive narratives, anchoring the target audience's worldview. There were periods in 2001, for instance, when the randomness of al-Qaeda's messages caused uncertainty among its strategists and other members over what concerns were influencing the aims of the terrorist organization.[41] This was an opportunity of when governments could have weakened terrorist organizations by spreading narratives countering al-Qaeda's narratives. Moreover, as Kurt Braddock and John Horgan argue, there is no consistent scholarly work on the theory of construction of counter-narratives.[42] Narratives countering those of terrorists exist in Islam and various cultural traditions. Theological debates or opposing traditions to radicalism are some directions for finding and enforcing narratives countering terrorists' propaganda.

3. Radicalization and Violent Extremism

Radicalization is another term having a variety of definitions. In the interests of strategic communications, this thesis favors the perspective that separates radicalization from extremism. For example, Carolin Görzig and Khaled Al-Hashimi define radicalization as "the process of progressively adopting more radical beliefs and ideas of Islam."[43] They stress that it is definitely related to terrorist acts. Meanwhile, radical Islam, according to Mohammed Hafez, has two direct attributes: it targets establishment of an Islamic state and presumes that terrorism or other forms of violence are the only justified means for that goal.[44] Ideas of Islamic resurgence acquired methods of political violence during a process which lasted several decades. Each stage of the evolution of radical Islamic ideology had its specific input toward the final result. At the same time, Ihsan Bal places extra emphasis on the individual's radicalization as a process of

[41] Max Abrahams, "What Terrorists Really Want: Terrorist Motives and Counterterrorism Strategy," in *Essential Readings in Comparative Politics*, ed. Patrick H. O'Neil and Ronald Rogowski (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012), 377.

[42] Kurt Braddock and John Horgan, "Towards a Guide for Constructing and Disseminating Counternarratives to Reduce Support for Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 39, no. 5 (2016): 382, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2015.1116277.

[43] Carolin Görzig and Khaled Al-Hashimi, *Radicalization in Western Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 2.

[44] Mohammed Hafez, "Radical Islam," in *Encyclopedia of Politics and Religion*, ed. Robert Wuthnow (Washington: CQ Press, 2007), 2, http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781608712427.s162.

identity building that consists of several stages.[45] He stresses that this personal evolution is critical for terrorism; thus, radicalization has to be deeply understood as a process by those seeking to prevent terrorism. These definitions leave room for tolerating people with radical ideology in their initial evolutionary stage. Furthermore, it is necessary in order to target them with counter-radicalizing narratives.

Meanwhile, approaches to radicalization vary in different countries. The chairman of the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, Rob Portman, points out that in contrast to a predominantly group radicalization in Europe, in the United States, radicalization is occurring mainly individually through the influence of jihadist media content.[46] The French Inter-ministerial Committee for the Prevention of Delinquency and Radicalization defines radicalization as "a process by which an individual or a group adopts a violent form of action directly linked to an extremist ideology with a political, social or religious content that disputes political, social or cultural order."[47] Enforcing the European group approach to radicalization, Jacquelien van Stekelenburg and Bert Klandermans argue that "radicalization" is "a collective intergroup process."[48] A group or socially constructed reality is necessary for radicalization. David R. Mandel attempts to define it simply as a progressive transformation in the degree of extremism expressed by an individual or group.[49] This makes radicalization a form of extremism and thus outlaws people with radical ideas, who did not commit any crime and could not be persecuted. Even though radicalized individuals do not

[45] Ihsan Bal, "Introduction: Why a Multi-Faceted Approach to Radicalization in Terrorist Organizations?" in *Multi-Faceted Approach to Radicalization in Terrorist Organizations*, ed. I. Bal, S. Ozeren, and M.A. Sozer (Amsterdam: IOS Press, 2011), 1.

[46] *ISIS Online: Countering Terrorist Radicalization and Recruitment on the Internet and Social Media: Hearing before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs,* U.S. Senate, 114th Cong. 2 (2016), https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-114shrg22476/pdf/CHRG-114shrg22476.pdf.

[47] Maddy Crowel, "What Went Wrong with France's Deradicalization Program?" *Atlantic*, September 28, 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/09/france-jihad-deradicalization-macron/540699/.

[48] Jacquelien van Stekelenburg and Bert Klandermans, "Radicalization," in *Identity and Participation in Culturally Diverse Societies,* ed. A. E. Azzi, X. Chryssochoou, B. Klandermans, and B. Simon (Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), doi: http://10.1002/9781444328158.ch9.

[49] David R. Mandel, "Radicalization: What Does It Mean?" in *Home- Grown Terrorism. Understanding and Addressing the Root Causes of Radicalization among Groups with an Immigrant Heritage in Europe*, eds. Thomas Pick, Anne Speckhard, and Beatrice Jacuch (Amsterdam, Netherlands: IOS Press, 2009), 111.

necessarily commit crimes, they constitute the key recruitment audience when jihadists promote homegrown terrorism in both the United States and Europe.[50]

Finally, the question of the relationship between radicalization and a terrorist act is one where scholars cannot come to a general conclusion. Görzig and Al-Hashimi ask how cognitive radicalization is related to behavior.[51] They advocate that focusing only on behavioral radicalization is not enough as terrorism can be understood in social and political contexts. Fathali M. Moghaddam considers the path from radicalization to terrorist act to be a staircase where an individual gradually adopts the only possible choice of destruction.[52] He argues that recruitment is one of the most important steps in the whole process that follows the adoption of terrorism as a strategy. In the stage of recruitment, an individual's worldview is limited to a simplistic categorization that helps him to justify the next step, which is preparation for a terrorist act. Even though radicalization usually anticipates recruitment, in some cases individuals adopt extremist ideas as a result of joining a criminal group.[53] Yet this can hardly be widespread, because terrorists usually operate deeply underground and accept members from those supporting their radical ideology and who have proved their support through acts of violence.

Policy makers and scholars have devised with several approaches to understanding Islamic radicalization, all of which share an understanding that radicalization is the key precursor to violence. What makes Salafi radicalization in Azerbaijan interesting for scholars is the presence of variations of Salafi followers as purists, politicos, and jihadists.[54] But at the same time, purists, who function openly, cautiously oppose politicizing Salafism and demonstrate hostility to jihadism. The context of Azerbaijan pushes purists to accentuate their loyalty to the state and condemn jihadism using narratives of global Salafism. These specifics may help uncover the

[50] Jenkins, "Stray Dogs and Virtual Armies," 18.

[51] Görzig and Al-Hashimi, *Radicalization in Western Europe*, 29.

[52] Fathali M. Moghaddam, "The Staircase to Terrorism: A Psychological Exploration," *American Psychologist* 60, no. 2 (February 2005): 161, doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.60.2.161.

[53] Yvon Dandurand, "Social Inclusion Programs for Youth and Preventing Violent Extremism," in *Countering Radicalization and Violent Extremism Among Youth to Prevent Terrorism*, ed. Marco Lombardi, Elman Ragab, Vivienne Chin (Amsterdam, Netherlands: IOS Press, 2015), 26.

[54] Gasimov, "Multimodal Salafi Engagement with Digital Media in Azerbaijan."

process by which radicals become jihadists and may contribute to finding gaps where the process of radicalization to recruitment may be broken.

4. Terrorist Propaganda

Propaganda has become an ever-growing tool of terrorists. Brigitte Nacos suggests that the definition of terrorism must include their communication activities.[55] The communication-related goals of terrorists include heightening public attention, a recognition of demands, the fostering of sympathy, and eventually legitimacy. It is sympathy that draws individuals to terrorist cells. Susan Carruthers would agree, saying that a fundamental part of terrorists' weaponry includes not only the need to communicate a fear but also the need through media to publicize their demands and spread their propaganda.[56] Governments may need to publicly relay the brutality of terrorists in order to justify the hard measures taken against them. She stresses that messages transmitted by violence also contribute to attracting adherents to terrorism. In his turn, Freedman points to a combination of al-Qaeda's fundamentalist nature in religious matters with its readiness to utilize the latest communication technologies for the sake of propaganda.[57] The scholars agree overall that terrorists place high importance on propaganda.

Because of the importance of propaganda for terrorists, they have exploited communication technologies in order to spread their stories and images from Afghanistan, Iraq, Chechnya, or Kashmir. This strategy has allowed them not to just inspire supporters residing in Western Europe or the United States, but also to train newcomers in all aspects of terrorist activities, including bomb-making. Forest explains that the closing of the terrorist facilities in Afghanistan (as a result of successful ground battles) pushed terrorist organizations to the Internet, where they organized remote training camps.[58] Indeed, Freedman states that within four years after 9/11, the number of jihadist websites increased more than 300 times; subsequently in 2005, the letter of al-Zawahiri declared that more than half of terrorist battles would, from that time onwards, take

[55] Brigitte Nacos, *Mass-Mediated Terrorism: Mainstream and Digital Media in Terrorism and Counterterrorism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2016), 14.

[56] Susan Carruthers, *The Media at War* (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 176.

[57] Freedman, "Strategic Communications," 76–78.

[58] Forest, "The Democratic Disadvantage in the Strategic Communications Battlespace," 81.

place in media space.[59] Ingram would agree; the physical destruction of al-Qaeda's leadership did not stop like-minded terrorists such as ISIS from placing propaganda at the core of their complex policies.[60] There is a consensus among authors that terrorists also pay great attention to communication technologies.

ISIS defectors claim that the terrorist organization emphasizes propaganda activities in support of the recruitment of new fighters, and generally, the organization aims at commanding a global audience.[61] Indeed, there is an interaction: propaganda furthered the recruitment of new terrorists who conducted terror acts far beyond the so-called Caliphate's borders; the appearances of these terrorists, along with subsequent messages, were used in enhancing propaganda. For example, Lesaca states that in 2014–2015, ISIS was releasing more than one audio-video message every day.[62] He points out that they largely utilized social media because it allowed them to reach individuals directly and make terror popular. Moreover, the *Washington Post* cites a security official from Morocco who insisted that online propaganda of ISIS motivated the majority of recruits from his country.[63] In 2014, almost one in five of the 46,000 ISIS-supporting Twitter accounts selected English as the primary language.[64] In 2016, during hearings in the U.S. Congress, it was confirmed that approximately 30,000 foreign fighters had joined ISIS with the help of its propaganda, and a new tendency to recruit citizens via social media to commit acts of terror in the Western countries had been observed by then.[65] As radicalization is the premise for recruitment, a government's activities to stop recruitment have to consider homegrown radicalization.

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[59] Freedman, "Strategic Communications," 77.

[60] Ingram, "A Brief History of Propaganda during Conflict," 31.

[61] Greg Miller and Souad Mekhennet, "Inside the Surreal World of the Islamic State's Propaganda Machine," *Washington Post*, November 20, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/nationalsecurity/inside-the-islamic-states-propaganda-machine/2015/11/20/051e997a-8ce6-11e5-acff-673ae92ddd2b_story.html.

[62] Lesaca, "On Social Media, ISIS Uses Modern Cultural Images to Spread Anti-modern Values."

[63] Miller and Mekhennet, "Inside the Surreal World of the Islamic State's Propaganda Machine."

[64] J.M. Berger and Jonathon Morgan, "The ISIS Twitter Census: Defining and Describing the Population of ISIS Supporters on Twitter," *Brookings Institution*, March 5, 2015, https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-isis-twitter-census-defining-and-describing-the-population-of-isis-supporters-on-twitter/.

[65] U.S. Senate, *ISIS online.*

5. Countering Terrorist Recruitment Propaganda

Seeking an answer to the question of how to challenge recruitment by countering terrorist propaganda seems worthwhile for developing an understanding of counterterrorism. Portman identified the three core elements of the strategy the United States needed in order to oppose radicalization as "exposing the enemy's lies, countering its false narratives, and encouraging credible voices to tell the truth to those most susceptible or receptive to the ISIS lies."[66] These elements essentially are based on the idea of changing people's behavior through a dissemination of information. To intervene and prevent radicalization in the United States, the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Community Partnerships conducts its activities of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE).[67] Meanwhile, during 2010–2016, the State Department's Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications, and after 2016 the State Department's Global Engagement Center, dealt with countering extremist ideology.[68] The concept of the Global Engagement Center's activities was to prevent individuals from turning their violent beliefs into actions.[69] It is easy to recognize that the U.S. government agencies have already furnished themselves with strategic communications in countering terrorists' propaganda for recruitment.

On the other hand, governments have capabilities to block the dissemination of undesirable ideas (prohibit literature, censor mass media, close accounts in social media) and by using these methods may attempt to disrupt terrorists' propaganda. Nacos says that even if governments block terrorists' direct propaganda through printed media or social networks, terrorists may find another medium.[70] Terrorists are not responsible for promoting values of freedom, but democratic governments are. When a government blocks information, it may cause concerns about suppressing freedom. Jowett and O'Donnell argue in favor of allowing publicity for negative information, including information terrorist propaganda can use because public confidence in

[66] U.S. Senate , *ISIS online.*

[67] U.S. Senate , *ISIS online.*

[68] Bruce Wharton, Remarks at Workshop on "Public Diplomacy In A Post-Truth Society," *States News Service,* March 20, 2017. https://www.state.gov/r/remarks/2017/268592.htm.

[69] U.S. Senate, *ISIS online.*

[70] Nacos, *Mass-Mediated Terrorism*, 179.

media within an open society is important.[71] This is a natural "disadvantage of democracy" for strategic communications.[72] Not only is censorship antithetical to democracy, but also open societies are generally resistant to governments' attempts to influence people's behavior by using information.

One way or another, the discussion about countering propaganda is linked to the notion of public trust in the government institutions in charge of it. The history of strategic communications in the United States demonstrates that a lack of public support for institutions whose main task was the dissemination of information resulted in their dismantling.[73] In 2002, the U.S. government faced severe criticism after media revealed information about a clandestine structure inside the Department of Defense that dealt with shaping the informational environment.[74] Arguably, the secrecy caused suspicions about the false information government might want to disseminate. Another example is that during the first two years of its existence, the U.S. Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications had purposely avoided posting materials in English so as not to run afoul of the Smith–Mundt Act, barring American administrations from activities to influence American citizens.[75] Yet all this time the propaganda of Salafi extremism in English had targeted and influenced American residents. Ingram fairly states that even though persuasion is a feature of democracy, a question of how to balance democratic principles and messaging strategies is not an easy one to answer.[76] Arguably, this is a very important direction to study related to the application of governmental strategic communications countering a propaganda of radicalism. Forest proposes making strategic communications countering violent extremism a deed of the wider public via encouraging all potential communicators in the United States to put forward a message countering

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[71] Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 306.

[72] Forest, "The Democratic Disadvantage in the Strategic Communications Battlespace," 88–89.

[73] Ingram, "A Brief History of Propaganda during Conflict," 34.

[74] Robin Brown, "Spinning the War: Political Communications, Information Operations and Public Diplomacy in the War on Terrorism," in *War and the Media: Reporting Conflict 24/7*, ed. Daya Thussu and Des Freedman (London: SAGE Publications, 2003), 90.

[75] Greg Miller and Scott Higham, "In a Propaganda War against ISIS, the U.S. Tried to Play by the Enemy's Rules," *Washington Post*, May 8, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/in-a-propaganda-war-us-tried-to-play-by-the-enemys-rules/2015/05/08/6eb6b732-e52f-11e4-81ea-0649268f729e_story.html?utm_term=.ab1a68f84c31.

[76] Ingram, "A Brief History of Propaganda during Conflict," 34.

violent ideology.[77] Lesaca would agree with that analysis, saying that narratives distributed through non-government channels attract more attention.[78] The right solution is somewhere between a government's coordination of strategic communications and the public's recognition of its significance in countering terrorists' recruitment efforts.

D. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

A government's direct engagement with strategic communications to counter homegrown radicalization does not contradict democratic values. As discussed in the literature review, Islamic terrorists use propaganda as the main tool to recruit supporters in their war against Western societies. They benefit from the openness and transparency of democratic societies, as well as of the latest communication technologies. After 9/11, the American media deliberately traded the freedom of expression for strengthening security.[79] Yet under formal peace, democratic norms and morality condition a democratic society in selecting tools in response to a given challenge. Governmental law-enforcement structures or private communication companies usually have the authority to silence those voices whose relation to propaganda has been revealed (e.g., after-the-fact closing of social network accounts).

As a part of its democratic reforms, Azerbaijan may face the challenge of making a choice between the freedom of expression and censorship of communication in order to prevent radical propaganda targeting its population. Nevertheless, a misapplication of censorship does not strengthen public confidence. Therefore, to counter homegrown radicalization, there is a need for a wider policy based on a scientific deep understanding of traditions, as well as consideration of the government's credibility and support from non-state actors.

Islamic terrorist networks rely on religious radicalization in their recruitment of new members who, additionally, own the citizenship of a particular targeted country. Moghaddam metaphorically presents a path of an individual to terrorist act as a staircase, where the most important transformation happens when an individual accepts the terrorist's morality.[80] Potential

[77] Forest, "The Democratic Disadvantage in the Strategic Communications Battlespace," 94.

[78] Lesaca, "Fight against ISIS Reveals Power of Social Media."

[79] Nacos, *Mass-Mediated Terrorism*, 174.

[80] Moghaddam, "The Staircase to Terrorism: A Psychological Exploration," 162.

targets live under various social conditions, far from the places where aspired morality dominates. Radicalization is first mentally constructed at the individual level before strategic communications come into play in this process of construction.

Yet radicalization does not mean necessarily an inclination to commit a crime, as "most radicals are not terrorists."[81] The successful interruption of radicalization prevents the further course of actions eventually leading to crime. Moreover, an individual's conscious refusal to continue "climbing the staircase" may serve the interests of countering recruitment activities. Thus, if countering homegrown radicalization by strategic communications succeeds, it can reproduce itself, contributing to an enhanced counterterrorism response.

In the Republic of Azerbaijan, countering radical religious propaganda may be successful if there are engaged, trusted narratives based on the traditional understanding of Islam. Görzig and Al-Hashimi argue that it is not greater religiosity, but, on the contrary, a lack of knowledge about religion, that often leads to religious homegrown radicalization.[82] In the early 1990s, weaker education of the traditional clergy helped radical Salafi groups in discrediting the traditional branches of Islam in Azerbaijan.[83] Salafi groups in Azerbaijan have targeted traditional Shi'a, Sufi, and Sunni communities to win supporters. Consequently, Shi'a clergy and the most pious adepts, who lost the initial battles for hearts and minds due to their unpreparedness for religious disputes, consider Salafism a hostile ideology.[84] Traditional worship of Sufi saints contradicts Salafism.[85] Thus, a natural rejection of Salafism exists in regions of Azerbaijan where Sufism is practiced.

In the practice of strategic communications, overcoming a gap of critical religious information may better reach the targeted group and gain greater trust and confidence by using

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[81] David R. Mandel, "Radicalization: What Does It Mean?," in *Home-Grown Terrorism. Understanding and Addressing the Root Causes of Radicalization among Groups with an Immigrant Heritage in Europe*, ed. Thomas Pick, Anne Speckhard, and Beatrice Jacuch (Amsterdam, Netherlands: IOS Press, 2009), 102.

[82] Görzig and Al-Hashimi, *Radicalization in Western Europe*, 47.

[83] Domitilla Sagramoso, "The Radicalization of Islamic Salafi Jamaats in the North Caucasus: Moving Closer to the Global Jihadist Movement?," *Europe-Asia Studies* 64, no.3 (April, 2012): 568, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2012.661933.

[84] Gasimov, "Multimodal Salafi Engagement with Digital Media in Azerbaijan."

[85] Gordon M. Hahn, *The Caucasus Emirate Jihadists: The Security and Strategic Implications* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2012), 50, https://nps.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=alma991002704759703791&context=L&vid=01NPS_INST:01NPS&search_scope=MyInst_and_CI&tab=Everything&lang=en.

aggressive communication tools. In some regions, one individual's insufficient knowledge contributes to weaker critical thinking skills, and thus, the respective individual becomes more prone to radical propaganda targeting him. Jowett and O'Donell argue that in order to make a radicalized individual change his behavior, the government should employ a "response changing form of persuasion."[86] Response-changing information requires an anchor, which resonates with the persuadee's beliefs. Johnson would support this argument, as he emphasizes the significance of interactive persuasion over the presentation of facts when planning information operations.[87] The non-violent Islamic traditions in Azerbaijan may provide the needed anchor; thus, trustworthy narratives could be built. Furthermore, as discussed in the literature review, the conditions favoring the elaboration of functional narratives based on true stories of Muslims exist in the Republic of Azerbaijan.

E. RESEARCH DESIGN

This comparative research investigates how and why the United States and Azerbaijan vary in their application of strategic communications, and attempts to draw lessons for strengthening the institutional framework of Azerbaijan. There are similar challenges of radical Islamic propaganda facing both the United States and the Republic of Azerbaijan; yet differences exist, inter alia, in the nature of governance, population, and traditions. This interdisciplinary research uses concepts from counterterrorism, communication, political science, history, sociology, and journalism. Moreover, the research benefits from the comparative analysis of institutional frameworks and narratives of strategic communications in the United States and Azerbaijan. The argument is built on the examination and analysis of relevant academic literature, policy documents of the two countries, open-sourced documents, as well as media materials in English, Russian, and Azerbaijani.

The underlying assumption of this thesis is that the American institutional framework for strategic communications can provide lessons for the enhancement of Azerbaijani homologous institutions. Though a variety of prohibitive measures are available for governments willing to fight against radicalization, this thesis is limited to strategic communications tools. Following the

[86] Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 39.

[87] Johnson, *Taliban Narratives*, 238.

historical development of strategic communications in the United States and Azerbaijan during the 20th century, the thesis contrasts the legacies of their institutional frameworks with regard to governmental response to Islamic radicalization.

The United States provides a good example of interaction between democratic values and strategic communications. American policy makers opposed the application of strategic communications even when structures such as the Committee on Public Information (CPI) and the Office of War Information (OWI) existed. Moreover, after World War II Congress banned government agencies from conducting strategic communications targeting the American population. Yet, the threat of homegrown terrorism made American policy makers recognize and reevaluate the role of strategic communications. Thus, American policy in this field is of particular interest for younger democracies such as Azerbaijan.

At the same time, narratives anchoring Shi'a Islam, as well as pre-Islamic culture, are used to counter the spread of Salafi ideology in Azerbaijan. It is noteworthy the way in which Azerbaijan has promoted the peaceful coexistence of various traditional religions in the country. Narratives of multiculturalism anchor both religious and cultural traditions and challenge the Salafi propaganda in Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan's way offers a beneficial example of the use of narratives in countering propaganda of radicalization for other parts of the world.

F. THESIS OVERVIEW

The argument of this thesis is structured along five chapters, as follows. The first chapter sets the context of research by introducing the key concepts of strategic communications and propaganda, narratives, radicalization and violent extremism, terrorist propaganda and countering terrorist recruitment propaganda. By discussing various meanings and definitions, this first part sets the common understanding for the research.

The second chapter highlights the historical development of the concept and organization of domestic strategic communications in the United States from World War I to the War on Terror. By addressing the historical examples of the creation of the U.S. CPI, OWI, and the House un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), the chapter disentangles the institutional framework before the War on Terror. Furthermore, it examines the U.S. strategic communications response to radical Islamic propaganda. Thus, the second chapter attempts to offer a comprehensive

perspective on the framework for strategic communications countering terrorists' use of propaganda for recruitment in the United States.

The third chapter examines the historical development of propaganda during the Azerbaijan People's Republic of 1918–1920, Soviet Azerbaijan of 1920–1991, and the Republic of Azerbaijan after 1991. The research follows the roots of the Azerbaijan government's relations with Islam as a way to assess the development of the institutional framework of propaganda. Then the research examines the Azerbaijan government's response to radical Islamic propaganda. Therefore, in contrast to the second chapter, this one attempts to synthesize the Azerbaijani perspective on radical Islamic propaganda.

The fourth chapter compares and contrasts the historical development of strategic communications targeting domestic audiences in the United States and Azerbaijan and the application of this policy in counterterrorism of the respective countries. Furthermore, the analysis highlights the weak and strong points in each of the cases. The chapter draws policy parallels and divisions between the two countries and highlights potential opportunities for strengthening the strategic communications in countering terrorism.

Finally, the last chapter attempts to answer the main research question by revising the legacies of both countries' strategic communications that may affect their counterterrorism policies. It reminds the reader about the milestones of the current research before drawing policy recommendations for Azerbaijan's counterterrorism policy in the field of informational warfare.

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II. STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES

This chapter examines the historical development of the concept and organization of domestic strategic communications in the United States from World War I to the War on Terror. It scrutinizes the policies and activities of the American administrations, consisting of the deliberate dissemination of information, or its censorship, in order to influence domestic public opinion and behavior. During various periods, those activities as they related to the domestic audience were called propaganda for a case, propaganda against a case, public relations, communication, strategic communications, global engagement, and countering violent extremism. Although the word propaganda carries a negative meaning in the United States, this chapter accepts its broader definitions as "honest and forthright communication intended to advance a cause through enlightenment, persuasion, or a dedicated sense of mission," and "propaganda is legitimate persuasion."[88] While influencing public opinion is also a goal of public relations, techniques often used by communication specialists include not telling all the truth or exaggerating parts of the truth. Deliberate falsehoods and malicious final goals are exclusively related to the perception of why propaganda is different from the previously mentioned. Fascists, Communists, and liberal democracies have used propaganda, but the difference was in the type of attitude they propagated.[89] Even though American administrations used the word propaganda relative to their own domestic activities very carefully before the 1950s, arguably open distortions of facts used by the HUAC finally defined domestic propaganda as an illegitimate policy for the U.S. government. By the mid-1980s, the designation of the U.S. Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948 (the Smith–Mundt Act) transformed from regulating the government's overseas information activities into prohibiting government's domestic propaganda. In 1985, Nebraska Senator Edward Zorinsky claimed that restricting the government from conducting domestic propaganda distinguishes the United States from the Soviet Union.[90] Thus, in the first parts of the Chapter I use the word propaganda authentically in comparison to the neutral meaning the U.S. government

[88] Canfield and Moore, *Public Relations*, 41.

[89] Lindley Fraser, *Propaganda* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), 192.

[90] John Hudson, "U.S. Repeals Propaganda Ban, Spreads Government-Made News to Americans," *Foreign Policy*, July 14, 2013, http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/07/14/u-s-repeals-propaganda-ban-spreads-government-made-news-to-americans/#.

officials applied to it; however, I examine those post-Cold War policies of American administrations that consisted of the dissemination of information domestically or the censorship of particular facts, naming them authentically as communications, global engagement, and countering violent extremism.

In order to follow the historical development of American domestic strategic communications, this chapter first presents a review of the Committee on Public Information (CPI, 1917–1919) and of the Office of War Information (OWI, 1942–1945) and discusses propaganda of the HUAC after World War II. Secondly, I discuss the Pentagon's military censorship after World War II connected to the wider governmental efforts of "selling wars" to Americans. Finally, I review the domestic strategic communications after 9/11, particularly communications countering the ISIS terrorist organization, its propaganda, and recruitment among U.S. residents. The key features of ISIS propaganda targeting Americans are also discussed. The important role of U.S. overt domestic propaganda during the World Wars is indisputable. Despite past administrations' affected disavowals of domestic propaganda, such messaging campaigns have been conducted, at least indirectly, through the use of large private media and public relation businesses. The U.S. government's delay in adopting direct strategic communications to the American public about the threat of homegrown terrorism has been a disadvantage to the counterterrorism policies of the United States.

A. THE CLASSICS OF AMERICAN DOMESTIC PROPAGANDA

The first attempt at organizing governmental strategic communications in the United States is attributed to President Woodrow Wilson's CPI. The CPI was created in April 1917 to promote pro-war public unity in the United States, where, by that time, some pro-German or Anglophobe groups had attempted to conduct anti-war propaganda.[91] Although the CPI was short-lived, being dismantled as soon as the war ended in 1919, its legacy continued. Between the two World Wars, the interest in propaganda and counter-propaganda leaned more toward the American private sector and academia, rather than the government itself.[92] One significant effort was the creation of

[91] James Mock and Cedric Larson, *Words That WontThe War: The Story of The Committee on Public Information 1917–1919* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1939), 4–9.

[92] Clayton Laurie, *The Propaganda Warriors: America's Crusade against Nazi Germany* (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 1996), 30.

the Institute of Propaganda Analyses in 1937. The Institute stood out due to its innovative method of countering propaganda by identifying it and revealing it to the public. Yet the pattern of World War I almost repeated itself in the late 1930s. In the United States, the existence of "organizations supporting Germany" raised further concerns[93] and contributed to debates about the ways to counter Nazi propaganda. The CPI and OWI integrated propaganda methods and tools, innovative for their time, now considered classic models of American domestic strategic communications.

1. Narrative of the American Responsibility for Promoting Freedom in the World

While the struggle for peace is probably the most widespread justification for wars, arguably a quintessence of American strategic communications narratives is the promotion of a domestic understanding of freedom for all people of the world. The CPI had a clear message of "America's idealism, selflessness, and indomitable purpose," through which it tried to sell the American public on the need for the U.S. participation in World War I, which was "a war to end all wars."[94] The United States did not have a defined narrative between the two World Wars, particularly before Pearl Harbor.[95] Pearl Harbor triggered debate about whether the United States should continue to adhere to its policy of isolationism. Later, the American idea of a struggle for the four freedoms—"freedom of speech and expression, freedom of worship, freedom from want, freedom from fear"[96]—became the core message of domestic propaganda during World War II. The message for the Cold War was in Harry Truman's Doctrine of March 1947, which announced that the United States was going to assist free people in their struggles all over the world because, from that point on, such assistance became a concern of national security for the United States.[97] This narrative indirectly meant that Americans had a duty to extend their domestic democracy to the world. Some additions to the main narrative were made during the Cold War, as for example

[93] Laurie, *The Propaganda Warriors*, 13.

[94] George Creel, *How We Advertized America* (New York, NY: Arno Press, 1972), 4.

[95] Thomas Johnson, "Thinking Narratively" (lecture, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, April 10, 2018).

[96] Allan Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda: The Office of War Information 1942–1945* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), 5.

[97] U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, Office of The Historian; *The Truman Doctrine, 1947*, https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/truman-doctrine.

during both the Korean and Vietnam Wars when the Americans were helping the "Good Asians" (South Koreans and South Vietnamese) to fight the "Bad Asians" (Communists, China, and North Koreans).[98] The end of Korean War allowed the administration to preserve the "elite's consensus."[99] The lack of unity among U.S. policy makers about the Vietnam War did not help the government's support for the one official narrative, as during the Korean War. The narrative was seriously challenged in light of the American support for the South Vietnam regime, which by conducting atrocities against the civilian population and deporting American reporters from the foremost media, such as the *New York Times* and *Newsweek* because of their consequent critics,[100] proved to be entirely undemocratic. Eventually, younger Americans recognized the Vietnam War as "immoral,"[101] despite the U.S. government branding it as noble.

The transformation of the free people's struggle narrative during the presidency of Ronald Reagan deserves special consideration. During World War II, Reagan played roles in some propaganda movies; in the late 1940s, he became a strong supporter of the HUAC's anti-Communism campaign; in the late 1960s, he fought against anti-Vietnam War propaganda, and while he was a president of the United States, his administration heavily used overseas propaganda efforts.[102] Unlike his predecessors, Reagan called for domestic mobilization in order to spread the American message overseas. During his inaugural address in 1981, Reagan, in addition to naming America "the bastion of Freedom" and stressing its commitment to peace, warned "enemies of freedom and terrorists" that the American nation was going to fight them using "will and courage."[103] Even those who criticize Reagan as a politician still recognize that foreign propaganda and domestic public relations were at their height during his administration.[104] But most interesting

[98] Susan Brewer, *Why America Fights: Patriotism and War Propaganda From the Philippines to Iraq* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 143.

[99] Steven Casey, *Selling the Korean War: Propaganda, Politics, and Public Opinion in the United States, 1950–1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 363.

[100] Brewer, *Why America Fights*, 187.

[101] Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 291.

[102] Nicholas Cull, David Culbert, and David Welch, *Propaganda and Mass Persuasion: A Historical Encyclopedia 1500 to the Present* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2003), 335.

[103] "First Inaugural Address," Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, January 20, 1981, last accessed January 31, 2018, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/archives/speeches/1981/12081a.htm.

[104] Noam Chomsky, *Deterring Democracy* (New York: Verso, 1991), 75–77.

is that while the main narrative of the Cold War stayed untouched, during the Reagan period a differentiation between Communist totalitarians, against whom the United States fought, and anti-Communist authoritarians, whom it supported, was introduced in order to justify the American backing of Central American dictatorships.[105] Support for dictatorships was framed under the narrative of preferring the lesser evil.

In contrast, during the Gulf War of 1991, the United States fought for the liberation of occupied Iraq, which allowed the framing of the war with idealistic approaches. President George Bush's domestic-oriented narrative was that Saddam Hussein was another Adolf Hitler.[106] A novelty was that the U.S. administration hired a public relations company—the Rendon Group—to investigate public opinion with the aim of constructing a better narrative.[107] The rise of international terrorism critically reshaped the classic narratives of the American strategic communications. I discuss this reshaping in the following paragraphs.

2. Institutional Framework

The U.S. government's strategic communications activity requires the cooperation of several government institutions. During World War I, the CPI was composed of the Secretary of State, the Secretary of War, and the Secretary of the Navy and headed by an experienced domestic political journalist, George Creel.[108] Indeed, the same actors—the media people, the Department of State, and the Pentagon—dominated the following history of American wartime propaganda. During the World Wars, their interaction was not smooth and contributed to the debate about favoring censorship of undesirable facts or dissemination of the preferred information. As a journalist, Creel advocated "for expression, not repression,"[109] trying to avoid wartime censorship.

[105] Seymour Maxwell Finger, "The Reagan-Kirkpatrick Policies and the United Nations," *Foreign Affairs* 62, no. 2 (Winter83/84): 438, Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed February 4, 2018).

[106] Brewer, *Why America Fights*, 231.

[107] James Bamford, "The Man Who Sold the Iraq War: John Rendon, Bush's General in the Propaganda War," *Democracy Now*, last modified November 21, 2005, https://www.democracynow.org/2005/11/21/the_man_who_sold_the_iraq.

[108] Mock and Larson, *Words That Won the War*, 61.

[109] Mock and Larson, *Words That Won The War*, 11.

Based on the CPI model, during World War II, a journalist headed the OWI, which in addition to that employed writers and publicists. But unlike the CPI, the OWI was not composed of the leaders of the State Department or DoD, and consequently, the latter organizations were not friendly to the newly created institution. The OWI functions related to foreign broadcasting irritated the State Department; its civilian communicative approach to warfare annoyed the U.S. military, from which the Navy leadership particularly considered propaganda a function of military intelligence.[110] The newly created Office of Strategic Services duplicated the OWI's functions related to overseas propaganda. It was only the OWI's domestic propaganda functions that other governmental institutions did not question.

The tensions between governmental institutions contributed to disagreements in tactics. The OWI advocated for a "strategy of truth," meaning that there would be minimal state interference into information, in order to demonstrate to the public that the government trusted them by sharing bad news as well.[111] Meanwhile, the military, possessing negative information about the casualties, advocated for its suppression. Similarly, the U.S. Treasury wanted to withhold information that the United Kingdom was selling some goods to the United States, while the United States was sending other goods for free under Lend-Lease.[112] The OWI had only to comply with leaving out undesirable facts. Yet the OWI's input to the debate built up two concepts emphasizing the facts or propagating an ideology.[113] While on the side of suppression nothing changed, these concepts widened the scope of the expression-oriented approach in American domestic strategic communications.

The pattern repeated itself in the 1950s. The HUAC was investigating un-Americanism, which meant pro-Communism. Emphasizing the Communist threat to the United States was intended to raise the awareness of the American public. The critics of the time considered that the government had not just emphasized but "exaggerated information" about the Soviet nuclear

[110] Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda*, 44–46; Laurie, *The Propaganda Warriors*, 136.

[111] Laurie, *The Propaganda Warriors*, 64–64.

[112] Susan Brewer, *To Win the Peace: British Propaganda in the United States during World War II* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1997), 206–209.

[113] Laurie, *The Propaganda Warriors*, 180.

capabilities, while "diminishing" the relevant U.S. military capacities,[114] in order to mobilize American public support for military interventions in Korea and Vietnam. Eventually, the Supreme Court's decision in 1957 upheld complaints that the propagating of un-Americanism violated the First Amendment, and opened the way for the abolition of the HUAC. This limited the subsequent U.S. administrations in how they could communicate their agenda to emphasize favorable facts.

In the absence of a single coordinated office of a domestically focused communication agency, the White House communication officials were in charge of communicating the administrations' narratives to the Nation. Even before the OWI was created, in order to propagate "the New Deal policy,"[115] the White House press office maintained direct relations with newspapers and provided them with materials (including cartoons). After the dismantlement of the OWI, during the Korean War, the Truman administration's public relation officials augmented the procedures of domestically oriented propaganda.[116] It was a period when government officials, private PR experts, and media representatives became one team.[117] Most of the time, the White House Office of Communications coordinated the work of those public relations practitioners. By the early 1980s, the power elites succeeded in launching propaganda campaigns when necessary by co-opting intellectuals and large media companies.[118] An active use of setting the media's agenda and the framing of the news became a popular strategy for communicating the required idea to the public.

3. The Role and Use of the Media

The strategic communications policies of American administrations have always included the use of the print media as a way of conveying narratives, but particular communication channels were invented to reach a wider and more diverse audience. Alongside the print media, the National Board of Historical Service provided the CPI various cartoons and pamphlets, prepared based on

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[114] Ruth Martin, "Operation Abolition: Defending the Civil Liberties of the "Un-American," 1957–1961," *Journal of American Studies* 47, no. 4 (November 2013), 1050, http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0021875813001345.

[115] Nicholas Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 11.

[116] Casey, *Selling the Korean War*, 362.

[117] Brewer, *Why America Fights*, 143.

[118] Michael Sproule, *Propaganda and Democracy: The American Experience of Media and Mass Persuasion* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 266.

accurate and false data by scholars and historians.[119] The CPI introduced new tactics. It created a voluntary organization called "The Four Minute Men," whose members conducted four-minute presentations based on mentioned pamphlets in various places where people gathered (including but not limited to theaters and churches). Arguably the use of volunteers in propaganda is one of the most significant legacies of the CPI.

While the United States rejected use of governmental domestic propaganda, Germany and the Soviet Union applied it, domestically and internationally, heavily using radio as a medium. Eventually, in the 1930s, some American experts became concerned about the propaganda use of radio by the Nazis.[120] Radio had a greater power of penetration. Moreover, use of radio did not require paper. In fact, the conservation of paper during World War II caused the OWI to pay greater attention to the use of radio in its propaganda activities. The OWI inherited the method by which writers and publicists prepared pamphlets from the CPI but conveyed them through radio, where as a result of cooperation with several stations, the OWI received regular domestic airtime.[121] The novelty was that the OWI gathered appropriate messages and then integrated them into stories broadcast by radio.[122] Thus, a sense of the total war and a notion that wartime sacrifices are inescapable and pervasive were conveyed domestically.

Additionally, from the very beginning, Hollywood has been a significant medium for American strategic communications efforts, targeting both domestic and international audiences. The CPI not only had a special Division of Films, which coordinated work with Hollywood on writing scenarios and producing documentaries, but also it censored the distribution of foreign movies that could harm the pro-war excitement of the American public. Thus, the British propaganda film *The Battle of the Somme* was restricted in the United States because its scenes of horror—dead and wounded soldiers—could negatively impact the recruitment of American soldiers.[123] The OWI followed the CPI's model, whose director Elmer Davis considered entertainment pictures as the most precise way to inject propaganda. Thus, Hollywood became an

[119] Creel, *How We Advertised America*, 6; Mock and Larson, *Words That Won the War,* 5.

[120] Laurie, *The Propaganda Warriors*, 13.

[121] Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda*, 60.

[122] Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda*, 61.

[123] Carruthers, *The Media at War*, 62.

important medium of the OWI.[124] A special liaison office was established in Hollywood. Along with helping the state's recruitment efforts and war bond sales, Hollywood's promotion of patriotic feelings helped it to capitalize on war movies.[125]

After World War II, American policy makers recognized Hollywood, as "the American advantage" in accessing communication channels,[126] which made its role as a medium increase. It was not a coincidence that in 1945 the HUAC concentrated its activities on countering Communist infiltration "to the motion picture industry."[127] Arguably, the successful discovery of Communist propaganda in Hollywood productions, like the movie *Mission to Moscow* of 1942,[128] served the HUAC's intention of benefiting from Hollywood as a medium for the anti-Communist campaign. Eventually, more movies, like *The Red Menace* and the documentary *Operation Abolition,* were produced, presenting to the American public the narrative about the Communist conspiracy against the United States.[129] The HUAC's investigations made Hollywood producers more compliant to include its domestically oriented narratives into movie production, pushing Hollywood toward becoming a medium for domestic propaganda.

4. Pentagon Input

The development of propaganda strategies required the Pentagon to integrate simple censorship into wider and more sophisticated policies without, however, stepping back from the information suppression approach in general. In the late 1940s, the Pentagon carried out a campaign with the short-term goals of justifying the necessity of the American nuclear weapon program and conveying the message to the American public that the U.S. military was prepared to handle nuclear weapons. The reason for this campaign was that after the Hiroshima and Nagasaki

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[124] Clayton Koppes and Gregory Black, "What to Show the World: The Office of War Information and Hollywood, 1942–1945," *Journal of American History* 64, no. 1 (June 1977): 88. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1888275.

[125] Carruthers, *The Media at War*, 86.

[126] Nancy Snow, *Rethinking Public Diplomacy: Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 4, https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203891520.ch1.

[127] Sproule, *Propaganda and Democracy*, 56; Ruth Martin, "Operation Abolition: Defending the Civil Liberties of the 'Un-American,'" 1957–1961," *Journal of American Studies* 47, no. 4 (November 2013): 1043, http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0021875813001345.

[128] Sproule, *Propaganda and Democracy*, 248.

[129] Martin, "Operation Abolition," 1052.

bombings terrified Americans questioned the need for the possession of the nuclear weapon.[130] The U.S. military promoted extensive media coverage for the nuclear bomb tests known as Operation Crossroads, and Universal Pictures produced several newsreels called *Ready for Atom Tests at Bikini*, *Operation Crossroads*, *Atom Bomb Tests*, and *Operation Crossroads Underway.* Though the tradition of the wartime cooperation between Hollywood and the military was still alive, pursuant to the trustworthiness of the narratives, the Pentagon did not pose itself as a creator of the newsreels. Later scholars characterized the tradition of exploiting relations established between administrations and the media during World War II in the early years of the Cold War as "camouflage propaganda" of the Truman administration.[131] Using links and control over media, the Pentagon enthusiastically expressed those pieces of information it wanted, suppressing even the existence of an alternative.

An exaggerated presentation of facts from the battlefields became mainly the Pentagon's business during the most of the military campaigns of the late 20th century, reaching its heyday in the course of the Gulf War of 1991 and setting a foundation for the improvement of its propaganda tactics in the 21st century. From the very beginning of the Gulf War, the Pentagon restricted uncontrolled media access to the war theater and profited from Saudi Arabia's general reluctance in issuing visas to the reporters.[132] The Pentagon established the pools of U.S. journalists and provided those journalists with reports and news from high ranked militaries. Unsurprisingly, mainly positive pictures about the liberation of Kuwait found their way to American television. Yet the significant innovation in the domestic propaganda of the Gulf War was how the Kuwait government in exile employed its financial capabilities to influence public opinion in the United States. It hired the American public relations company Hill and Knowlton, which joined in spreading the Kuwait government's narratives and produced exaggerated, anonymous, or fake materials about atrocities in Kuwait for the American media.[133] Yet CNN's direct broadcasts of war casualties from Baghdad did not fit the government's agenda, and as a result of the broadcast,

[130] Nathan Atkinson, "Newsreels as Domestic Propaganda: Visual Rhetoric at the Dawn of the Cold War," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 72, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/426609.

[131] Atkinson, "Newsreels as Domestic Propaganda," 76.

[132] John MacArthur, *Second Front: Censorship and Propaganda in the Gulf War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 7.

[133] MacArthur, *Second Front*, 64.

some people remembered Vietnam.[134] The Pentagon recruited retired officers who then actively promoted its message by producing independent military expert op-eds and participating in various TV and radio shows, organized by the media that cooperated with the government.[135] Eventually, during the Iraq War of 2003, the American administration provided government officials, retired high-rank militaries, experts, lobbyists, and Internet bloggers with talking points that they further disseminated in media.

Introducing the policy of journalists embedded in the military units together with restricting access to the battlefield became a novelty during the Iraq War. Unlike the Gulf War, in 2003 the Pentagon allowed journalists to accompany troops, of course, under the condition that the reporters were not to report on sensitive materials.[136] In addition to that, the range of media was widened; print magazines and foreign journalists were allowed into the pools in order to provide the wider public with the arranged information from the battlefield. Embedded reporters' natural solidarity with the fighting units resulted in materials praising the military. This uncritical approach and one-sided admiration of the army's professionalism was the key effect of embedding journalists, which the military counted on.[137] Definitely, it was based on an exaggeration of some facts while not reporting others, but it recognized the media's natural desire for colorful pictures and hot news.

B. STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION DURING THE WAR ON TERROR

The metaphorical dimension of the War on Terror makes it completely different from the previous wars America fought after World War II. In the War on Terror, everybody could be an enemy. At the same time, it became the first war that did not need many efforts to be propagated among Americans. Unlike World War I, or still, differently from World War II (only taking into consideration the Pearl Harbor attack), it is a war that Americans have not been able to avoid at all—it started with al-Qaeda's attack on America's territory. The War on Terror did not need war propaganda, though the American government heavily used its narratives and got public support for their agenda in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Middle East.

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[134] Philip Taylor, *War and the Media: Propaganda and Persuasion in the Gulf War* (Manchester, United Kingdom: Manchester University Press, 1992), 8.

[135] Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 384.

[136] Carruthers, *The Media at War*, 227.

[137] Carruthers, *The Media at War*, 229.

The term War on Terror is the main narrative of American strategic communication after 9/11. The origins of the metaphor could easily resonate with the War on Drugs campaign conducted by earlier American administrations, yet because of the intangibility of terror, unlike drugs, as a narrative, it could also be associated with the victorious Cold War.[138] The introduction of the term "war" has made possible following the framing of the policies and employing of public relations consultants to "spin" the message.[139] President George Bush announced that the war would be a struggle of good against evil, targeting not only terrorists but also those who harbored them. This message of struggle resembles the one typically used for a total war. The government started with the messages well-known to the nation from the movies, demonstrating how people should act during crises. By that time Hollywood blockbusters, such as *The Siege*, had already integrated tough rhetoric of the heroes into scenarios, resulting in popular mobilization during a crisis period. The president's expression "Make no mistake" echoed the same expression from *The Siege*.[140] The tough messages inspiring people to a self-sacrificing struggle got to Hollywood as a result of the government's wartime domestic propaganda and developed there during peacetime in various dramatic scenarios. Unlike the propaganda during previous wars, the version during the War on Terror has had an easier task because there hardly was a need to sell this war to the nation already affected by 9/11. The framing of policies and information on the War on Terror became the main strategy of the government's communication with its domestic audience.

It is not surprising then that by having widespread media on its side, the Bush administration in its efforts to organize strategic communication during the War on Terror was counting on Hollywood particularly. Public emotions caused by 9/11 guaranteed the media's compliance to disseminate information as the government wanted, without asking questions.[141] Countering al-Qaeda's propaganda was a realm where the administration acted even more openly. Then national security adviser Condoleeza Rice provided special guidance to CNN and Rupert Murdoch's Fox News leaders in order not to give a platform to terrorists.[142] Generally, the White

[138] Erin Steuter and Deborah Wills, *At War with Metaphor: Media, Propaganda, and Racism in the War on Terror* (Plymouth, United Kingdom: Lexington Books, 2008), 8.

[139] Steuter and Wills, *At War with Metaphor*, 9.

[140] Brewer, *Why America Fights*, 236.

[141] Steuter and Wills, *At War with Metaphor*, 159.

[142] Steuter and Wills, *At War with Metaphor*, 169.

House favored media representatives who acted in accordance with its propaganda message and non-disclosure of criticizing information policy by granting them access to interviews with administration officials.[143] The media helped to create the conditions of a non-debate and acceptance, yet employing the entertainment industry could evoke even more supportive public emotions. The role of Hollywood would be to promote patriotism, and the White House invited movie producers to participate in the War on Terror.[144] The Murdoch-owned Fox studio produced the first post-9/11 movie called *Behind Enemy Lines* that resounded with the administration's narrative.

The period after 9/11 has shown significant development in the debate about the institutionalization of the U.S. government's domestic strategic communication. In 2004, the Defense Science Board Task Force's report on strategic communication defined the domestic realm as a part of the government's public affairs activities, stressing that because of the borderless nature of media, it cannot be distinct from the activities targeting foreign audiences.[145] While mainly considering a foreign audience, the report particularly mentions the White House Office of Global Communication, which was created in June 2002, as the institution best prepared to shape domestic perceptions after the 9/11 attack. Much attention was given to enhancing government-private cooperation, particularly in order to attract American intellectual human resources to the organization of strategic communication, even though the report focused on strategic communication with a foreign audience. Later decisions, such as the formation of the Interagency Policy Coordinating Committee on Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communications in 2006 and then the establishment of the interagency Counterterrorism Communication Center (CTCC), enforced the coordinative approach in the field.[146] The State Department's Digital Outreach Team,

[143] Steuter and Wills, *At War with Metaphor*, 167.

[144] Douglas Kellner, *Cinema Wars: Hollywood Film and Politics in the Bush-Cheney Era* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2009), 1.

[145] U.S. Department of Defense, *Office of the Secretary of Defense*; *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communications*, 2004 (Washington, DC: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense For Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, 2004), https://fas.org/irp/agency/DoD/dsb/commun.pdf.

[146] *Strategic Communications and Countering Ideological Support for Terrorism: Hearing Before the Terrorism, Unconventional Threats and Capabilities Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services*, U.S. House of Representatives, 110th Cong., 1st Sess. (November 15, 2007) (statement of Duncan Macinnes, principal deputy coordinator of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State).

created in 2006,[147] and the State Department's Center of Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC), created in 2011, dealt with radical Islam and al-Qaeda propaganda on the Internet; however, as a part of the State Department, the CSCC was limited to foreign audiences in their vernacular languages not familiar to the American audience.[148] The CSCC's well-known Twitter page "Think Again Turn Away" became the first governmental campaign directly engaging U.S. officials with the Internet audience in order to counter terrorists' worldwide recruitment activities online. Still, the narratives of these new institutions targeted populations abroad.

The August 2012 hearings in the House of Representatives demonstrated that policy makers did not have a clear vision with regard to which governmental institution is needed to conduct domestic strategic communication. At the time, some scholars fairly considered the Smith–Mundt Act as a legislative obstacle to the government's strategic communication targeting Americans.[149] Initially, the provisions of the Act said that the government's overseas information activities were allowed. Amendments to the Act in 1970 and 1985 made it clear that overseas information was restricted from domestic distribution because "American taxpayers shouldn't fund propaganda for an American audience."[150] In the Internet age, it meant that the State Department should refrain from broadcasting any propaganda materials abroad because they would reach domestic audiences. The policy makers were concerned that the State Department's good informational material used overseas to fight al-Qaeda could not be used at home.[151] Eventually, the Smith–Mundt Modernization Act of 2012 "authorized the domestic dissemination

[147] Lina Khatib, William Dutton, and Michael Thelwall, "Public Diplomacy 2.0: A Case Study of the U.S. Digital Outreach Team," *Middle East Journal* 66, no. 3 (Summer 2012): 456, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/486028.

[148] *The State Department's Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications: Mission, Operations and Impact: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, And Trade of The Committee on Foreign Affairs*, U.S. House of Representatives, 112th Cong., 2nd Sess. (August 2, 2012) (statement of Alberto Fernandez, coordinator, CSCT).

[149] Matthew Armstrong, "Operationalizing Public Diplomacy," in *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, eds. Nancy Snow and Philip M. Taylor (New York: Routledge, 2009), 68, https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203891520.ch8.

[150] Hudson, "U.S. Repeals Propaganda Ban, Spreads Government-Made News to Americans."

[151] Michael Hastings, "Congressmen Seek to Lift Propaganda Ban," *BuzzFeedNews*, May 18, 2012, https://www.buzzfeed.com/mhastings/congressmen-seek-to-lift-propaganda-ban?utm_term=.lrlOQMo2k#.sbnkxjlB1.

of information about the United States intended primarily for foreign audiences."[152] Still, the Modernization Act was related only to the dissemination of information, not to its adaptation for the American public that made sense in the case of countering terrorist propaganda. Influencing American public opinion was not authorized for the Department of State. The Smith–Mundt Modernization Act did not consider any authorities of American government institutions, other than the Department of State.

Meanwhile, the popularization of the Internet was followed by terrorists' interest in this new technological advantage, which contributed to radical Islamists' growing capacities to find supporters among Americans. Despite the fact that al-Qaeda showed interest in recruiting people with American passports almost from the late 1990s,[153] because of the small number of homegrown terrorist cases in the United States from 2002 to 2008 and the absence of committed attacks before 2010,[154] the causes of homegrown jihadism were not addressed as much as other realms of the War on Terror. Yet the first alarm rang when the first American suicide-bomber—Shirwa Ahmed—died in a suicide attack in Mogadishu in October 2008. The following investigations revealed more preparations for terrorist plots with U.S. citizens being recruited while in the United States by al-Qaeda affiliated terrorists via the Internet.[155] An American-born radical cleric, Anwar al-Awlaki, was recruiting Americans to conduct terrorist acts in the United States; another U.S. citizen, Samir Khan, left the United States in 2009 to establish al-Qaeda's online magazine *Inspire* targeting English-speaking communities. In early 2011, the Homeland Security Secretary, Janet Napolitano, admitted the growing threat of involvement of U.S. citizens in terrorist plots in the United States.[156] By that time, al-Qaeda had elaborated narratives

[152] H. R. 5736, 112th Cong. (2012), https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-112hr5736ih/pdf/BILLS-112hr5736ih.pdf.

[153] *Understanding Terrorist Motivations, Testimony before the Subcommittee on Intelligence, Information Sharing and Terrorism Risk Assessment of the Committee on Homeland Security*, U.S. House of Representatives (December 2009) (testimony of Kim Cragin, The Rand Corporation) http://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT338/.

[154] Jenkins, *Stray Dogs and Virtual Armies Radicalization and Recruitment to Jihadist Terrorism in the United States since 9/11*.

[155] Jenkins, *Stray Dogs and Virtual Armies Radicalization and Recruitment to Jihadist Terrorism in the United States since 9/11*.

[156] *Understanding the Homeland Threat Landscape: Hearing before the Committee on Homeland Security*, House of Representatives, 112th Cong. (February 9, 2011) (testimony of Janet Napolitano, Homeland Security Secretary).

specifically addressing U.S. residents and based on the terrorists' violent religious ideology.[157] The immigrants in the United States who practiced Salafism became the target audience for radical Islamist propaganda through Internet media. Yet being Salafi did not mean acceptance of jihadism instantly. Osama bin Laden defined the key narratives distinguishing jihadists, such as disavowal of polytheism and its supporters (*al-Wala' wa-l-bara'*), religious struggle (*jihad*), and excommunication of other Muslims (*takfir*).[158] Factually, *al-Wala wa-l-bara* is a narrative countering religious tolerance. Furthermore, ISIS institutionalized and enhanced the online propaganda and recruitment of U.S. residents. Even though by 2015 American policy makers officially recognized the threat of lone-wolf terrorists, radicalized online, to the United States,[159] the government's countering of radical propaganda efforts was only in its early stage in 2016. Arguably, from the very beginning of the War on Terror, the United States needed strategic communication policies to counter domestic terrorism and related issues.

The government's response to the domestic realm included various policies countering extremism; among them was working with ethnic and religious communities in order to instill a rejection of radical religious ideology. In 2011, the U.S. Government released the first counter extremism strategy that included countering extremist propaganda, yet no new resources were assigned for its realization.[160] By 2011, the National Counterterrorism Center was partly focused on countering the narratives of violent extremism, particularly in relation to the communities that interested terrorists as recruitment audiences.[161] In this regard, the National Counterterrorism Center, in cooperation with the DHS and FBI, disseminated unclassified information about the realities of the terrorists' recruitment among American communities. Finally, in 2015 the Office

[157] *Understanding the Homeland Threat Landscape*: Hearing before the Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives, 112th Cong. (February 9, 2011) (testimony of Michael E. Leiter, Director of the National Counterterrorism Center).

[158] Shiraz Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism: The History of an Idea* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016), 103.

[159] *ISIS Online: Countering Terrorist Radicalization and Recruitment on the Internet and Social Media: Hearing Before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs,* U.S. Senate, 114th Cong., 2nd sess. (July 6, 2016) (statement of Rob Portman, Chairman of the Subcommittee).

[160] *Combating Homegrown Terrorism: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on National Security of Committee on Oversight and Government Reform,* U.S. House of Representatives, 115th Cong.,1st sess. (July 27, 2017) (statement of Seamus Hughes, Deputy Director, Program on Extremism, George Washington University).

[161] Leiter, testimony on *Understanding the Homeland Threat Landscape*.

for Community Partnerships (OCP) at DHS was established in order to counter domestic violent extremism, propaganda, and recruitment. Its CVE activities are defined as "proactive actions to counter efforts by extremists to recruit, radicalize, and mobilize followers to violence."[162] The establishment of the OCP and its CVE Task Force constitutes by now the government's most significant attempt to use strategic communication in countering domestic terrorism in the United States.

Unlike traditional propaganda institutions before, the OCP is not committed to clear narratives but to counter extremism. It generally promotes tolerance, inclusion, and pluralism, and in order to work out more clear messages within those ideas, it attracts representatives of the possible target audiences of terrorists. The activities of the OCP have a specific direction to disrupt the beliefs and will to act of those who have been radicalized and recruited to commit a terror act.[163] As a part of its Peer-2-Peer Challenging Extremism competition beginning in 2015, university students from different countries developed their own narratives countering terrorist recruitment through social media.[164] Countering violent extremism among foreign audiences is a task of the Global Engagement Center (GEC), created in March 2016 as a replacement for the Center of Strategic Counterterrorism Communications. Relative to its messaging strategy, the GEC exploits the same attitude as the OCP, with the only difference being that its foreign partners for the particular foreign audiences construct the GEC's messages. Even though the GEC avoids direct online engagement with its audiences, it admits that it aims to change the behavior of foreign audiences,[165] thus making possible easy identification of the GEC as a propaganda institution. Although the OCP, being domestically focused, uses more careful expressions, its CVE measures

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[162] *Combating Homegrown Terrorism: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on National Security of Committee on Oversight and Government Reform,* U.S. House of Representatives, 115th Cong.,1st sess. (July 27, 2017) (statement of Ron DeSantis, chairman of the Subcommittee).

[163] *Combating Homegrown Terrorism: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on National Security of Committee on Oversight and Government Reform,* U.S. House of Representatives, 115th Cong.,1st sess. (July 27, 2017) (statement of George Selim, director of the OCP DHS).

[164] *ISIS Online: Countering Terrorist Radicalization and Recruitment on the Internet and Social Media: Hearing Before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs,* U.S. Senate, 114th Cong., 2nd sess. (July 6, 2016) (testimony of George Selim, director of the OCP DHS).

[165] *ISIS Online: Countering Terrorist Radicalization and Recruitment on the Internet and Social Media: Hearing Before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs,* U.S. Senate, 114th Cong., 2nd sess. (July 6, 2016) (testimony of Meagen Lagraffe, Chief of Staff to The Coordinator and Special Envoy, Global Engagement Center, DoS).

are nothing other than a set of activities targeting the changing behavior of potential extremists; this places the OCP on the short list of U.S. domestic propaganda institutions.

The OCP uses an innovative methodology to engage the population into the realization of the goals of CVE. In order to promote its narratives, the OCP uses various entities—law enforcement and governmental organizations, municipal officials, civic organizations and the private sector. At the same time, it considers "young people, Millennials, victims of terrorists, and community-based organizations" the most credible instruments for CVE.[166] By 2017 the OCP's grant program funded 26 projects for the prevention of terrorism in the United States.[167] The prevention activities funded by the grant, among others, presumed awareness campaigns and countering terrorism narratives. The OCP works with private sector communications companies to counter terrorist propaganda online. It tries to incorporate both cyberspace and local community space. Community organizations promote youth education about the prevalence of misinformation about Islamic values on the Internet and social media. The OCP's commitment to educate and then engage wider groups of the population to counter terrorism propaganda is an innovation in the sphere. It works for people's recognition of their potential and shared responsibility between the government and the public in countering terrorist communications.

The FBI's Office of Partner Engagement (OPE) has carried out similar communication programs as a part of its prevention activities targeting domestic communities at greater risk of radicalization. Its activities go in two directions: 1) community engagement and 2) the production of educational materials. The community engagement activities contribute to the formation of a wider network of messengers, who, at the same, time participate in the compiling of narratives. The production of educational materials, in fact, resembles classic propaganda activities enhanced with the use of Internet technologies. The FBI created a website, "Don't be a puppet; pull back the curtain on violent extremism," and promoted its use by various mediators as educational material

[166] *ISIS Online: Countering Terrorist Radicalization and Recruitment on the Internet and Social Media: Hearing Before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs,* U.S. Senate, 114th Cong., 2nd sess. (July 6, 2016) (testimony of George Selim, director of the OCP DHS statement of Rob Portman, Chairman of the Subcommittee).

[167] *Combating Homegrown Terrorism: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on National Security of Committee on Oversight and Government Reform,* U.S. House of Representatives, 115th Cong.,1st sess. (July 27, 2017) (statement of George Selim, director of the OCP DHS).

targeting general audiences including children.[168] The agency also produced several documentaries, such as *A Revolutionary Act*, *Redemption*, and *Active Shooter: Managing the Mass Casualty Threat*, mainly related to the acts of the homegrown terrorism in the United States. The FBI communication programs with the aim to prevent crime incidents are complementary to its law enforcement activities.

C. THE PROPAGANDA OF ISIS

Even though ISIS announced the establishment of its statehood in January 2007, its embryo developed from an earlier period as an al-Qaeda branch in the region. Al-Qaeda considered its war against the United States as the prelude to creating an Islamic state, as it becomes clear from Osama bin Laden's speeches about the restoration of a caliphate.[169] Unlike al-Qaeda, ISIS prioritized the war against apostates, such as Shi'a Muslims and other traitors backed by the West. It is widely accepted that the main narrative of ISIS propaganda is that it is a real Muslim Sunni state, and one of the key targets of its propaganda was the promotion of the immigration to the territories under the terrorists' control.[170] ISIS used six sets of themes: brutality, mercy, victimhood, war, belonging, and utopianism.[171] In addition to the promotion of immigration, some ISIS supporters targeted the intimidation of its opponents, employed revelations of the atrocities of the coalition forces, and emphasized the inspiration of supporters and recruitment. ISIS promised an alternative life, yet its Hollywood-style documentaries and magazine *Dabiq* were saturated with colorful and inspiring pictures reflecting the set of narratives. The narrative about "five-star jihad" pretending that ISIS members enjoy luxury lives in villas captured by the organization was very attractive for vulnerable individuals. A lot of unsatisfied people followed ISIS's appeal, disseminated in social media. Yet in its attempts to sell a war against a broad set of enemies, such as apostate Muslims, Jews, Christians, non-Muslim Kurds, and the Western countries, ISIS needed an effective

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[168] *Combating Homegrown Terrorism: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on National Security of Committee on Oversight and Government Reform*, U.S. House of Representatives, 115th Cong.,1st sess. (July 27, 2017) (statement of Kerry Sleeper, assistant director, Office of Partner Engagement, FBI).

[169] Cole Bunzel, *From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State* (Brookings Institution: The Center for Middle East Policy, 2015), https://www.brookings.edu/research/from-paper-state-to-caliphate-the-ideology-of-the-islamic-state/.

[170] Ingram, "A Brief History of Propaganda during Conflict," 31; Nacos, *Terrorism and Counterterrorism*, 216.

[171] Charlie Winter, *The Virtual 'Caliphate': Understanding Islamic State's Propaganda Strategy* (Cambridge, UK: Quilliam, 2015), 22–30.

organization of propaganda and a variety of complementary narratives and stories defining the reasons for the hostility toward those enemies.

The organizational charter of ISIS propaganda consisted of official and non-official bodies. The official propaganda institutions are the Al Hayat Media center (whose main focuses are recruiting and presenting an idyllic society) and Al Furqan Media Foundation (whose main effort is to spread fear).[172] The Al Hayat Media center has produced visual, audio, and written materials, including *Dabiq* magazine, dealt with social media, and disseminated those materials on the Internet. In addition to these official organs, various groups of supporters and ISIS fighters constantly produce propaganda on the Internet. One of them, the al-Battar Media Group, specializes in the mobilization of ISIS activities on Twitter and has attracted about 32,000 followers.[173] Those who professionally deal with propaganda issues in ISIS are considered the elite of the organization, and are better paid and cared for accordingly.

The pillars of the ISIS Salafi-jihadi ideology initially prioritized its anti-Shia and anti-Sufi narratives to anti-Americanism. From the perspective of the 20th century's Salafi terrorists preceding al-Qaeda, the Western colonizers are their traditional enemy. Though al-Qaeda opposed targeting Shi'a Muslims in Iraq, the future ideologist of ISIS, Zarqawi, argued in 2004 that Shi'as are a primary danger in comparison with Americans; later ISIS leader al-Baghdadi proclaimed in 2007 that fighting against traitors, unbelievers, liars, criminals, and other apostate Muslims is of greater necessity than that against Crusaders.[174] Thus, even pursuant to a desire to relate anti-Shi'a narratives to the war against the United States, ISIS could hardly accuse Iran of serving the United States; thus, it blamed the United States for assisting in the realization of Iran's Shi'a agenda. The anti-American narratives of ISIS ideologists originally included the United States' complicity in Iran's attempts at turning Iraq into a Shi'a state and the weakness of the American military in Iraq.[175] Yet after the coalition's airstrikes of August 2014, ISIS (which by that time had just become a caliphate) officially called for attacks on Americans all over the world. In September

[172] Erin Saltman and Charlie Winter, *Islamic State: The Changing Face of Modern Jihadism* (Cambridge, UK: Quilliam, 2014), 38.

[173] Imran Awan, "Cyber-Extremism: ISIS and the Power of Social Media," *Society* 54, no. 2 (April 2017): 142, https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-017-0114-0.

[174] Bunzel, *From Paper State to Caliphate*.

[175] Bunzel, *From Paper State to Caliphate*.

2014, ISIS widened the main narrative that became the "Crusader-Shi'a-Zionist conspiracy against the Muslim Sunni State."[176] As the United States became a target for ISIS, anti-American narratives were no less important than anti-Shi'a ones.

The first ISIS threats toward the United States became notorious mainly because of the American media's large coverage. According to its mandate, the Al-Furqan Media Foundation disseminated the videotaped beheadings of the American journalists James Foley and Steven Sotloff in September 2014. Nacos points out that because YouTube instantly blocked the James Foley video, as well as people's aversion to seeing the full picture of the horror, the Internet was not primary in delivering the message to the Americans, whom ISIS targeted originally.[177] But the American media granted the following heavy coverage of the video and subsequently of ISIS's messages.

Another tactic of ISIS propaganda is its use of the U.S. or other Western policy makers' expressions related to ISIS in the interests of enforcing and legitimizing the terrorists' own narratives. The permanent rubrics of *Dabiq* have been called "The Enemy Words" and continuously discussed mostly pieces of American leaders', policy makers' and high ranked officials' statements endorsing ISIS's message of the day. In July 2014 it presented excerpts of statements of the high-ranking U.S. National Security Council official Douglas Ollivant and Senator John McCain, who had both in various words expressed their concerns about ISIS control over large territories, ISIS becoming a natural state, and terrorists' gains in weaponry.[178] The magazine tried to demonstrate the absence of consensus among U.S. policy makers relative to the necessity of fighting with ISIS. Issues of *Dabiq* published after the strikes of 2014 cited the U.S. former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger saying that Iran's Shi'a agenda was more dangerous for America than ISIS and former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) official Michael Scheuer arguing that the United States should not interfere in Iraq and should leave its Shi'a and Sunni enemies to

[176] Winter, *The Virtual 'Caliphate*, 22.

[177] Nacos, *Terrorism and Counterterrorism*, 353.

[178] "DABIQ Magazine, issue 1, July 2014," Clarion Project, February 23, 2018, https://clarionproject.org/docs/isis-isil-islamic-state-magazine-Issue-1-the-return-of-khilafah.pdf; "DABIQ magazine, issue 2, July 2014," Clarion Project, February 23, 2018, https://clarionproject.org/docs/isis-isil-islamic-state-magazine-Issue-2-the-flood.pdf.

fight one another, which would bring the United States victory without paying a cent.[179] *Dabiq*'s comments said that contrary to American general wisdom, power was not in weapons and technology but it was a belief in God and agreed that the United States should let ISIS deal with Iran. The same issue presented excerpts of the testimony of U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel saying that ISIS had increased its global profile, was greatly organized, was attracting Americans, and that it was safe to plot attacks against the United States while residing in ISIS-controlled territories.[180] Framing this sort of information with traditional *Dabiq* reports about ISIS's attacks against Shi'as and life in the Caliphate mainly targeted American audiences. Anchoring one's own propaganda narratives targeting the enemy's population using the enemy's own message is not a new concept and contributes to the legitimacy of ISIS propaganda.

ISIS has largely enhanced the speed of the dissemination of its propaganda products by using social media, particularly Twitter and Facebook. One of the most significant shifts in ISIS propaganda targeting recruitment of U.S. residents' was the growing use of online jihadists' content. By 2015 a vast majority of ISIS recruitment cases among U.S. residents excluded any physical meetings with recruiters, while including prior reading and sharing of online content and communication with ISIS recruiters through social media.[181] Twitter was the most popular social network for ISIS propaganda for recruitment, granting secure private communication. During the heyday of ISIS propaganda activities, there were, by late 2014, about 2,000 propagandists who tweeted 150 times every day, and the number of overt ISIS supporters on Twitter reached 46,000.[182] Eventually, it resulted in Twitter suspending those accounts, and their number decreased in 2015. ISIS exploited social media capabilities, recognizing the role of online inspiration and its reduced risks. Since 2014 there have been 12 jihadist attacks (six being lethal) in the United States perpetrated by U.S. residents inspired by ISIS in social networks. ISIS-inspired American militants

[179] "DABIQ Magazine, issue 4, October 2014," Clarion Project, February 23, 2018, https://clarionproject.org/docs/islamic-state-isis-magazine-Issue-4-the-failed-crusade.pdf.

[180] Clarion Project, "DABIQ magazine, issue 4, October 2014."

[181] *Jihad 2.0: Social Media in The Next Evolution of Terrorist Recruitment: Hearing Before Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs,* U.S. Senate, 114th Cong., 1st sess. (May 7, 2015) (testimony of Peter Bergen, Director, International Security Program, New America).

[182] *Jihad 2.0: Social Media in The Next Evolution of Terrorist Recruitment: Hearing Before Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs,* U.S. Senate, 114th Cong., 1st sess. (May 7, 2015) (testimony of J.M. Berger).

Elton Simpson and Nadir Soofi (2015 attack in Garland) were recruited via social media; U.S. citizens Omar Mateen (2014 attack in Orlando) and Joshua Cummings (2017 attack in Denver) were self-radicalized, or "self-recruited," online.[183] Even before the territorial losses of the last few years, ISIS was persuading those U.S. residents who wished to join the organization in the Middle East that staying in the United States and fighting there is more important. According to research of the think-tank New America, the speeches of Anwar al-Awlaki inspired American recruits in 72 terrorist plot cases since 9/11, including those after he was killed in 2011.[184] This demonstrates that killing terrorists does not kill their ideas. The U.S. National Counterterrorism Center considers that despite the loss of its territory, ISIS will be able to continue to inspire terrorist attacks worldwide.[185] As the numbers show, its territorial losses hardly reduced the effects of ISIS online propaganda and recruitment in the United States as well.

D. MEASURING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

Measuring the effectiveness of strategic communication is a challenging task because not all the goals of strategic communication are easily measured.[186] One of the main obstacles is in correlating the narratives accurately to their achieved effect. In terms of effect, strategic communication aim to bring about the desired change in people's behavior. Even though change of beliefs can be approximately measured, they do not necessarily result in a change of behavior.[187] Despite the difficulties, the key tasks of measurement of the effectiveness of strategic communication can be addressed, albeit imperfectly.

For effective strategic communication, both clear objectives and expectations are essential.[188] They may constitute visible markers of changes in the environment and thus help in

[183] Peter Bergen, David Sterman, Albert Ford, and Alyssa Sims, *Jihadist Terrorism 16 Years after 9/11: A Threat Assessment* (Washington, DC: New America, 2017), https://na-production.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/Terrorism_9-11_2017.pdf.

[184] Bergen et al., *Jihadist Terrorism 16 Years after 9/11*.

[185] *Combating Homegrown Terrorism: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on National Security of Committee on Oversight and Government Reform*, U.S. House of Representatives, 115th Cong.,1st sess. (July 27, 2017) (statement of Ron DeSantis, chairman of the Subcommittee).

[186] Paul, *Strategic Communications,* 154.

[187] Paul, *Strategic Communications,* 119.

[188] Paul, *Strategic Communications,* 5.

measuring the overall success of the strategic communication. Depending on the nature of the objectives and expectations, there may be various ways to measure whether those objectives and expectations are met. "Selling a war" to Americans has been the objective for the majority of strategic communication campaigns of several U.S. administrations, and public support for government policies has been the main expectation. Target-audience analysis may help to evaluate an ongoing strategic communication campaign and introduce better influencing tools.[189] Public opinion research polls, the dynamics in war bond sales, and the number of terrorist plots can be used in measuring to what degree objectives and expectations are reached. At the same time, even if there are positive dynamics in reaching the objectives of strategic communication, whether the effect can be attributed to strategic communication or something else has to be determined.

The evaluation of the means through which objectives have been targeted can help to understand the effect, if any, of the strategic communication.[190] This process includes a reassessment of how and why the narratives were selected, an analysis of how efficient the control over the medium was, and a determination of the ratio between the expression of the information and its repression. American propaganda institutions of the first two World Wars, the CPI and the OWI, both selected very emotional narratives justifying the U.S. participation. The justification of American participation in World War I is by now recognized within the framework of the CPI's narratives.[191] Self-censorship, voluntary censorship, and enforced censorship during those wars demonstrate the degree of greater control over the medium. Meanwhile, Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor was no less persuasive for Americans to recognize the necessity of U.S. participation in World War II. Measuring the efficiency of the organization of strategic communication cannot determine clearly the role of strategic communication in the process of reaching the government's goals. But it can help to adjust and enhance the policy of strategic communication, which constitutes a significant task for the measurement itself.

Measuring the effectiveness of strategic communication in countering terrorism is linked to the overall success of counterterrorism, including countering terrorists' recruitment. The final

[189] Paul, *Strategic Communications,* 149.

[190] Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 331.

[191] Mock and Larson, *Words That Won the War*, 338.

success of counterterrorism would be a victory over terrorism. In his discussion of what a victory over terrorism is, Daniel Byman points out that for the Americans, success in countering terrorism includes the reduced level of deaths from terrorism on U.S. soil.[192] In order to reduce the level of deaths from terrorism, individuals' way to violence must be interrupted or terrorists' plots must be revealed in time. While the investigation into plots is a task for law enforcement, the preventive interruption of individuals' way toward the commitment of a terrorist act is a responsibility for strategic communication. The success of strategic communication countering terrorists' propaganda in the United States is necessary for victory itself.

E. CONCLUSION

The public concerns about American administrations violating the freedom of expression have followed the historical development of the concept and organization of domestic strategic communication in the United States from World War I to the War on Terror. During its two-year-long existence, the CPI faced the dilemma of balancing the necessities of a war and the values of a democracy, and Creel found a solution by naming the censorship CPI employed as "voluntary."[193] When Congress discussed the necessity of establishing the OWI, particular constraints were considered to prohibit the future propaganda agency from trying "to control morale."[194] Some scholars point out that the OWI's influence over Hollywood movie production contributed to the degeneration of critical thinking among those affected by propaganda movies.[195] After World War II, the HUAC counter-propaganda activities and anti-communist propaganda movies caused concern among liberal groups in the United States who saw these efforts as a threat to the First Amendment. At the same time, the military keep their right to censor information and to put restraints on journalists by setting journalist pools.

While the United States has conducted international propaganda openly, it has carried out the same activities targeting domestic audiences less directly. Often, strategic communication directed at domestic audiences was based on the White House's connections among large

[192] Daniel Byman, *The Five Front War: The Better Way to Fight Global Jihad* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2008), 52.

[193] Creel, *How We Advertised America*, 18.

[194] Laurie, *The Propaganda Warriors*, 57.

[195] Koppes and Black, "What to Show the World," 105.

businesses, the media, and public relations professionals. The symbiosis between some leading media companies and particular large businesses interested in government and military orders has helped to promote the necessary war propaganda. American administrations have used several other factors in conducting domestic propaganda: the interflow of public relations professionals from administrations to large business and back, the presence of some media executives on the Boards of Directors of defense contractors, and major media outlets owned by businesses having interests in cooperation with the government. Several U.S administrations have been able to subcontract the dissemination of their messages to private businesses.

The American public has been very intolerant of anything called domestic propaganda and related activities that have included domestically oriented policies variously referred to as public relations, public diplomacy, and public opinion management. From the late 1980s, a new definition of government propaganda—strategic communication—became widespread. Unlike propaganda, as Douglas Wilbur notes, "the vast majority of strategic communication is both legitimate and necessary for a modern society to function."[196] At the same time, American administrations have preserved their capabilities of selling a war to Americans when needed and are no longer accused of not paying respect to the First Amendment as it happened in the 1950s.

The pervasiveness of the mass media in the United States is very important when governmental domestic strategic communication is discussed in terms of democratic values. The periods of war have made it clear that a government may use popular mobilization and find a way to attract the leading media to its side during crises; still, the media will have to persuade the public. The simple way to do it in a democracy is to make people think about what is needed and elevate some facts over others, or to frame the news.[197] Framing of news allows media to appear objective and works for its power of persuasion. The increased flow of information facilitated by technological advances in communication has empowered media to use framing to implicitly convey the government's narratives to the public.

[196] Douglas Wilbur, "Propaganda's Place in Strategic Communications: The Case of ISIL's Dabiq Magazine," *International Journal of Strategic Communications* 11, no. 3 (May 2017): 211, https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2017.1317636.

[197] Stephen Cooper and Jim Kuypers, "Embedded Versus Behind-the-Lines Reporting on the 2003 Iraq War," in *Global Media Go to War*, ed. Ralph Berenger (Spokane, WA: Marquette Books, 2003), 162.

The 9/11 attack on American soil and the War on Terror revived a dimension of warfare—a war of ideas. The United States defeated al-Qaeda in Afghanistan in 2003, killed Osama bin Laden in 2010 and Anwar al-Awlaki in 2011, and largely defeated ISIS by 2017. The State Department joined the war directing communication at the nations of the Middle East to counter terrorist ideology; however, the government was initially prohibited from disseminating the same ideas to Americans. In contrast to their losses on the battlefields of the Middle East, during this time the terrorists were gaining ground on the Internet by disseminating their ideas recorded on videos, inspiring supporters, and propagating a violent ideology among Americans. Still being very careful of anything resembling domestic propaganda, the FBI and DHS began their activities to prevent the spread of violent radical ideologies in the United States, under the framework of Countering Violent Extremism. Because decisive victories in the Middle East did not follow those on the ideological battleground in the United States, the latter constitutes the vulnerable flank and requires enforcement. The U.S. government has to organize its strategic communication countering terrorist narratives in such a way that the larger American population would join a total information war on terror.

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III. STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND PROPAGANDA IN AZERBAIJAN

This chapter examines the history of strategic communication in Azerbaijan starting with the 20th century. The examination encompasses both governmental strategic communication countering terrorism and the strategic communication of radical Salafists in Azerbaijan. Notably, unlike in the United States, the term "strategic communication" has no real meaning in Azerbaijan. In the context of Azerbaijan, the term *təbliğat*[198] is used to refer to the spread of ideas among people. It carries a neutral connotation and is most literally translated into English as propaganda or popularization.[199] Governmental institutions of Azerbaijan use *təbliğat* to describe their promotion of Azerbaijani culture, tourism in Azerbaijan, or the propaganda of patriotism among youth. At the same time, relative to the propaganda concerning the radical religions or hostile Armenian deception, the term *təbliğat* is used as well. The term propaganda, however, as a neologism, is sometimes used in the Azerbaijani language, and in those very rare cases, it carries the highly negative connotation. To be consistent, I use the word propaganda throughout this chapter, even though in the original it appears as *təbliğat* or strategic communication.

From the 20th century, the history of state propaganda in Azerbaijan consists of three distinct periods, each of which has its particular legacy in the domestic propaganda of the Republic of Azerbaijan. In this chapter, I discuss the ideology and religious propaganda of the First Azerbaijan Republic (1918–1920), because its legacy is in the establishment of the narratives of secularism and nationalism in contemporary Azerbaijani propaganda. Then I proceed to the anti-Islam propaganda during Soviet times (with a short break during World War II), because its legacy has largely enforced the secularism of contemporary Azerbaijani propaganda and affected its institutional framework. Finally, I address the patriotism propaganda of the independent Republic of Azerbaijan after 1991, whose legacy will be the mobilization of popular support for the

[198] Təbliğat can be most closely spelled in English as Teblighat.

[199] *Azerbaijani Explanatory dictionary*, s.v. "təbliğat," accessed March 20, 2017, https://azerdict.com/english/təbliğat.

government under the perceived existential threat[200] to Azerbaijani nation-statehood triggered by Armenian aggression.

Following the analysis of the development of state propaganda in Azerbaijan, the chapter sheds light on domestic religious extremism and the challenges for state propaganda in responding to that problem. Concerns related to domestic religious extremism in Azerbaijan, as a result of importing radical Shi'ism, grew after the Islamic revolution in neighboring Iran. Nonetheless, a sense of alienation from Iran is inherent in the majority of Azerbaijanis because of the suppression of their compatriots in Iran. That identification does not work for the popularization of ideas if they originate in Iran; additionally, government propaganda in Azerbaijan uses accusations in connection with Iran as one of the most powerful narratives targeting citizens of Azerbaijan in order to compromise radical Shi'a ideas. The Salafi branch of Islam, which is non-traditional for Azerbaijan, appeared in the country in the early 1990s. Following it, within a few years, Salafi-jihadists established their first cells in the country. Initially, the Gulf countries' benevolent foundations promoting aid to Muslim populations spread the Salafi version of Islam among the more vulnerable people, such as refugees or other audiences, affected by socio-economic difficulties of the early 1990s. As Barbara Walter argues, an extremist ideology may better succeed even among moderate audiences during times of uncertainty.[201] Then Azerbaijanis who studied in the religious institutions of Saudi Arabia established separate communities of well-educated Salafists, who in their turn developed a propaganda system based on the narratives of Global Salafism and targeting the local population in Azerbaijan. At the same time, becoming a Salafi made those people possible targets for jihadist propaganda and terrorist recruitment. Despite the comprehensive administrative measures limiting radical propaganda in Azerbaijan, the country is particularly vulnerable to Islamic radicalization from abroad.

[200] The set of perceived existential threats includes Russian backed Armenian aggression, and Russia, Iran, and Armenia warmed up ethnic separatism among minority nationalities residing in Azerbaijan. The three countries have organized cooperative activities targeting the Lezgins, Avars, and Talishs of Azerbaijan. From time to time, these countries have organized pseudo-scientific conferences, where a few of representatives of Azerbaijani national minorities have raised their own cases of irredentism. Even though ethnic separatism is not popular among the Lezgins, Avars and Talishs residing in Azerbaijan, according to general perceptions, in case of the separation of the Armenian populated territories, irredentism may be triggered by the aforementioned three countries in other regions of Azerbaijan as well. This eventually would challenge the existence of Azerbaijani nation statehood per se.

[201] Barbara Walter, "The Extremist's Advantage in Civil Wars," *International Security* 42, no. 2 (2017): 36, https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00292.

A. IDEOLOGY AND PROPAGANDA DURING THE AZERBAIJANI PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC

In 1918–1920, during the period of the first independent republic of Azerbaijan, as a result of the several decades' long domestic debates concerning Azerbaijani national identity, the pillars of the national propaganda of secularism were set up. In the early 20th century, the Azerbaijani philosopher Ali Hussainzade's formula of Turkism, modernization, and Islamization dominated in the debate between intellectuals.[202] The ideologist of Pan-Turkism Ziya Gokalp admitted that he adopted the slogan "Turkify, Islamicize, Europeanize" from Hussainzade.[203] This fact has determined the uniformity of Azerbaijani and Turkish national secularism, in contrast to the traditional religious division between Azerbaijanis and Turks.[204] Under the influence of Ali Hussainzade's ideas, the colors of the national flag of the first republic reflected the priorities of the national ideology as Turkism (blue), then modernism (red), and then Islamism (green). In 1919, Azerbaijani intellectuals were still debating the national identity and language.[205] Yet the majority of them, including the publishers of the most widely readmagazine, *Molla Nasreddin,*[206] were clearly anti-clerical. Various scholars argue that given the pan-Turkic aspirations of the Ottoman Empire,[207] an extreme Turkism posed a threat to the independence of the republic, and this reinforced the elaboration of the term *Azerbaijanism.*[208] This notion shortly reappeared in the

[202] Azer Turan, *Ali bey Hussainzade* (Moscow: Salam Press, 2008), 12, http://history.az/pdf.php?item_id=20110904020023775&ext=pdf.

[203] Brenda Shaffer, *Borders and Brethren: Iran and the Challenge of Azerbaijan Identity* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002), 31.

[204] Even though some scholars argue that Turks have lived in Azerbaijan from the ancient times, particularly following the immigration of Oghuz Turks into Azerbaijan in the tenth century finally established Azerbaijanis as ethnical Turks, but unlike Turks, who are Sunni, Azerbaijanis mainly practiced Shi'a Islam, beginning from the 16th century. Shi'a Islam was the dominant religion of the first historical unified Azerbaijani state—the Safavid state. Despite the fact that the Turkic tribes constituted the major power of the Safavid state and the Azerbaijani language was the official language of the state, it fought several wars with the Ottoman Empire (see more: Mojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 105–107; Shaffer, *Borders and Brethren*, 15–18; Audrey Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks: Power and identity Under Russian Rule* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1992), 7).

[205] Farideh Heyat, *Azeri Women in Transition: Women in Soviet and Post-Soviet Azerbaijan* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), 50.

[206] The satirical magazine *Molla Nasreddin* was published in 1906–1931 by an Azerbaijani satirist-writer Jalil Mamedgulizadeh.

[207] Turkay Nefes, "Ziya Gokalp's Adaptation of Emile Durkheim's Sociology in His Formulation of the Modern Turkish Nation." *International Sociology* 28, no.3 (May 2013): 339, https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580913479811.

[208] Svante Cornell, *Azerbaijan since Independence* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015), 40.

1950s and finally formed in the 1990s within a different context, and I discuss it in the chapter. In 1918, the Declaration of Independence of the Azerbaijan People's Republic[209] guaranteed equal rights and conditions for the development of all of its citizens, regardless of nation, class, religion, or gender. Gradualism and compromise became parts of Azerbaijani national culture.[210] It put an end to the debate on identity and historically constituted the limits of Azerbaijani nationalism and determined the narratives of its propaganda.

The propaganda of the Azerbaijan People's Republic had as its main goal the mobilization of its population in the face of an existential threat to the Azerbaijani state whose national government did not even control its capital. On May 28, 1918, the republic itself was proclaimed in neighboring Georgia's capital Tbilisi, and the first government was formed in the remote Azerbaijani city of Ganja because the capital Baku was still under Bolshevik control.[211] In addition to that, the Armenian Dashnak units were committing massacres in several cities of the country.[212] Because tsarist colonial policy manipulated the ethnic tensions between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, during that period an opinion that the Armenians were the Russians' surrogates emerged among Azerbaijanis for the first time.[213] Despite these tumultuous conditions, the national government of Azerbaijan promptly established its institutions, including the Ministry of Education and Religious Confession, then the Ministry of Social Provision and Religious Affairs, and eventually, in September 1918, the Islamic Spiritual Administration.[214] Among the first measures, the Azerbaijani Military Ministry authorized special military clergymen to teach the

[209] Azerbaijan People's Republic was an independent parliamentary republic proclaimed on May, 28, 1918, on the territory including but not limited to the contemporary Republic of Azerbaijan. Its delegation participated at the Peace Conference in Paris in 1919, presented a memorandum concerning the establishment of the Republic, and met with the U.S. President Woodrow Wilson. Despite the de-facto recognition by the Allies in early 1920, the process of its official recognition as an independent state was interrupted because of Russia's occupation of Azerbaijan in April 1920, followed by the establishment of Bolshevik rule and the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan.

[210] Cornell, *Azerbaijan since Independence*, 28.

[211] Cornell, *Azerbaijan since Independence*, 37.

[212] Fuad Akhundov, "Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan: Chronology of Major Events (1918–1920)," *Azerbaijan International* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 26–29, https://azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/61_folder/61_articles/61_chronology.html.

[213] Audrey Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks: Power and Identity under Russian Rule* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1992), 43.

[214] Sattarov, *Islam, State, and Society in Independent Azerbaijan*, 42–43.

basics of Islam in army units because such teaching could boost the morale of the Azerbaijani soldiers.

For the first time in its history, the government of the Azerbaijan People's Republic attempted to elaborate a purely national approach to Islamic traditions that was supposed to consider the historical existence of Shi'a and Sunni Azerbaijanis. There is a lack of data about exact numbers of Shi'as and Sunnis in Azerbaijan during the early 20th century. Arguably, the numbers were largely affected by the fact that from the 15th century the territory of Azerbaijan had been the arena of conflicts between the Shi'a Safavi and the Sunni Ottoman rulers. Yet, the first historical Azerbaijani state in the 16th century was largely formed as a result of a successful mobilization of Turkic tribes under Shi'a concepts of Islam. Its founder, a Sufi convert to Shi'ism, Ismail Safavi, proclaimed Shi'ism the official religion of Azerbaijan in 1501.[215] In terms of the ratio of Shi'as to Sunnis, Audrey Altstadt finds that in the early 1900s, Sunnis generally lived in rural areas of Azerbaijan, bordering the Northern Caucasus, from where some of them migrated to Baku.[216] She mentions that under the Russian rule, Shi'as and Sunnis in Azerbaijan had separate ecclesiastical boards. In order to mitigate the inter-confessional divisions between Azerbaijanis, the Islamic Spiritual Administration of 1918 was designed to have two equally empowered chairs—a Shi'a and a Sunni.[217] This act of the government emphasized that in Azerbaijan Islam was projected to be subordinate to the interests of a secular nation-state.

The main legacy of the Azerbaijan People's Republic was that the secular government of Azerbaijan shaped the relationship between religion and state by integrating Islamic values into its secular national ideology together with tolerance for other religions. The propaganda of Islamic values did not encompass the non-Muslim population of the Azerbaijan People's Republic. Christian pupils studied the Bible in schools; non-Muslims were given the right to study native languages and practice religious ceremonies while being exempt from working during their religious holidays.[218] The government was concerned about the lack of educated Islamic clergy,

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[215] Mojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 105.

[216] Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks*, 58.

[217] Sattarov, *Islam, State, and Society in Independent Azerbaijan*, 42–43.

[218] Sattarov, *Islam, State, and Society in Independent Azerbaijan*, 43.

yet the Azerbaijan People's Republic's life was not long enough to practice its policy concerning the education of a national clergy. The fall of the Azerbaijan People's Republic, as a result of the Bolshevik invasion in 1920, cut short the formation of the national propaganda strategy with regard to religion. The compatibility of Islamic culture and democratic values[219] became the main legacy of the two years of the Azerbaijani People's Republic, which Azerbaijani policy makers and intellectuals addressed after the country regained independence in 1991.

B. THE SOVIET PERIOD BEFORE WORLD WAR II

In order to transform the perceptions of the largely rural population of Russia, the Bolsheviks, who came to power in Russia in 1917, vitally needed propaganda and mobilized all the available media to meet propaganda goals.[220] After the occupation of Azerbaijan in 1920, the propaganda methods used by the Bolsheviks on controlled territories widened to Azerbaijan as well. The Bolsheviks from Russia shared their expertise with the local Bolsheviks in Azerbaijan in the organization of propaganda targeting the Azerbaijani population.

The Orthodox Church was a supporter of the Russian tsar and the key opponent of the Bolshevik ideology in rural Russia. The first Bolshevik anti-religious propaganda body was set up as a section of the Commissariat of Justice in 1918[221] and was devoted to purely anti-clergy propaganda. It published an anti-clergy propaganda journal targeting the Russian peasantry, trying not to seem essentially anti-religious.[222] By the time of the occupation of Azerbaijan, the Bolshevik ideologists had already understood that countering religion resulted in the growing authority of the Church.[223] Very often the illiterate but pious peasantry rejected their atheism propaganda narratives. The Bolsheviks formed so-called agitation trains, which traveled over the former empire being decorated and covered with various pictures of modernity, heroic soldiers, peasants and workers, and carrying the teams of the Bolshevik propagandists.[224] A train named Red East

[219] Cornell, *Azerbaijan since Independence*, 44.

[220] Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 250.

[221] Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization 1917–1929* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 68.

[222] Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State*, 69.

[223] Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State*, 66.

[224] Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State*, 58–59.

was particularly designed, and its team was equipped to target the Muslim population of Central Asia. Subsequently, the initial propaganda of the Bolshevik government in Azerbaijan targeted the Azerbaijani population and aimed at compromising the local Islamic clergy.

Initially, Islam was the greatest challenge for the Bolsheviks in Azerbaijan.[225] Similar to their activities in Russia, in Azerbaijan, the Bolsheviks' propaganda declared the narrative of "liberation of the peasants' world view from the rule of religious prejudices."[226] Before the invasion, socialist groups in Azerbaijan rallied on the government's inability to promote reforms in the interests of the peasantry.[227] After the invasion, the Bolsheviks' propaganda benefited from the grievances of the peasantry. As in other territories under Bolshevik control, an attack against class enemies—religious leaders—happened in Azerbaijan.[228] The secularity of Azerbaijani statehood was already declared during the Azerbaijan People's Republic in 1918, but the Bolsheviks went further in their countering religion. Within the first two weeks of the Bolsheviks' invasion, in May 1920, the new government issued the decree prohibiting religious classes and any religious ceremonies in all educational institutions.[229] The emphasis on enlightenment allowed the Bolsheviks to introduce not only anti-clergy but purely anti-Islamic narratives to the domestic audiences. To create stories anchoring the national culture, pamphleteers largely used the experience of the Azerbaijani national satiric authors from the *Molla Nasreddin* magazine of earlier times.[230] In the late 1920s, the all-Soviet narrative saying that the veil was a symbol of backwardness was spread in Azerbaijan.[231] While modernism was the main idea of anti-religious propaganda narratives in Azerbaijan, anti-clergy stories were based on popular biases and anchored people's feelings of disregard toward some hypocritical clergymen.

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[225] Sattarov, *Islam, State, and Society in Independent Azerbaijan*, 44.

[226] Sattarov, *Islam, State, and Society in Independent Azerbaijan*, 46.

[227] Cornell, *Azerbaijan since Independence*, 39.

[228] Cornell, *Azerbaijan since Independence*, 52.

[229] Sevil Bayramova, "Religia v Azerbaidjane v Pervie Godi Sovetskoy Vlasti" [Religion in Azerbaijan, during the First Years of the Soviet Power], *Kavkazplus*, November 14, 2015, https://www.kavkazplus.com/news.php?id=131#.WlKSf9-nHn0.

[230] Sattarov, *Islam, State, and Society in Independent Azerbaijan*, 52.

[231] Sattarov, *Islam, State, and Society in Independent Azerbaijan*, 50.

The Communist governments of Soviet Azerbaijan used various media to spread anti-religious narratives and stories among the local population. Communist authors wrote various works, artists drew caricatures, and movie makers shot movies based on anti-religious stories. During the 1920s, several national movies criticizing religion were produced,[232] just as the state-owned newspapers and journals were used for spreading the message. One of the tasks of the Communist Youth Union (Komsomol) in the Soviet Union was to struggle against religion in rural places.[233] In Azerbaijan, some Komsomol propagandists even lost their lives during ideological clashes with a pious population.[234] To put anti-religious messages into practice, the Soviet authorities encouraged the creation of anti-religious societies all over the Soviet Union. The Union of Atheists, which waged largely anti-Islam agitation in Azerbaijan in the late 1920s, consisted mainly of non-Muslims.[235] The Soviet authorities disseminated some of the Azerbaijani anti-religious propaganda organs, such as *Molla Nasreddin* magazine, in other Muslim regions of the Soviet Union.[236] Moreover, the Azerbaijani Communist party's Women's Department propagated anti-religious narratives of women's emancipation, such as disapproving of seclusion and polygamy, using as a medium the Azerbaijani magazine *Women of the East*, which was modeled after particular all-Soviet magazines printed in Moscow.[237] Various women's clubs and popular journals were established to promote women's social participation. Soviet totalitarian terror forced Azerbaijani writers and poets to play important roles in anti-Islamic propaganda. Using movies and literature, the Soviet authorities of Azerbaijan disseminated stories that religious holidays were unhealthy; instead of religious holidays they introduced the new Communist holidays. Following an all-Soviet anti-Islam campaign named *hujum* (attack),[238] in the 1930s, Azerbaijani authorities outlawed key Shi'a rituals and Sufi sacred places. From their very first days, the Bolshevik governments in Azerbaijan used their total control over all the media to monopolize the information realm.

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[232] Sattarov, *Islam, State, and Society in Independent Azerbaijan*, 52.

[233] Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State*, 178.

[234] Sattarov, *Islam, State, and Society in Independent Azerbaijan*, 55.

[235] Sattarov, *Islam, State, and Society in Independent Azerbaijan*, 50–51.

[236] Heyat, *Azeri Women in Transition*, 78.

[237] Heyat, *Azeri Women in Transition*, 85.

[238] Sattarov, *Islam, State, and Society in Independent Azerbaijan*, 50.

The mainly separate Islamic clergymen resisted with their own propaganda against Communism. The new regime was proclaimed "the punishment of Allah" and "the end of the World"; Shi'a, Sunni, and Sufi leaders called for the unification of all of the Muslims in Azerbaijan against the regime.[239] Individual clergymen spread various interpretations of Islamic miracles among the domestic population as rumors, pumping up people's interest in religion. The institution of so-called *pir*[240] outlived the hardest anti-Islamic periods in Azerbaijan. From time to time separate rumors about divine miracles happening at a particular pir enforced an Islamic appeal to people, warning them of becoming unbelievers. Even though the Soviet authorities could not totally control rumors, they controlled any formal Muslim organizations and the mosques, which became the conduits for government propaganda targeting the pious population. During religious ceremonies, official clergymen disseminated the message in support of the Soviet regime among Muslims. It said that "Allah wanted everyone to be satisfied with his destiny, and the Soviet government was the destiny."[241] Yet a religion did not fit into Communist ideology generally. The attack on Islam continued, and in the 1930s, the Soviet authorities of Azerbaijan closed the mosques and converted their buildings to schools, libraries, and clubs. The stronger totalitarianism in Soviet Azerbaijan became, the tougher the government responded to any manifestation of a religious propaganda.

In line with the general Soviet policy, propaganda of the governments of Soviet Azerbaijan targeted the populations of Muslim countries, spreading among them narratives of an ideological struggle against imperialism. In September of 1920, Baku hosted the "Congress of the People of the East," during which communists and other anti-imperialists discussed their ideological struggle against world imperialism.[242] At the same time, in order to cut informational interaction of the population of Azerbaijan with the Muslim countries,[243] the Soviet authorities of Azerbaijan in

[239] Sattarov, *Islam, State, and Society in Independent Azerbaijan*, 47.

[240] Pir—originates from Sufism, and originally meant a religious master; but, in Azerbaijan it is widely used by Shi'as and refers to a place where there is a grave of some relative of the Prophet, or a miraculous religious authority. Visiting a pir and donating money can help in being cured from disease or resolution of other problems. Destroying a pir will eventually bring bad luck on a destroyer.

[241] Sattarov, *Islam, State, and Society in Independent Azerbaijan*, 49.

[242] Cornell, *Azerbaijan since Independence*, 46.

[243] Sattarov, *Islam, State, and Society in Independent Azerbaijan*, 52.

1924 abandoned the Arabic-based Azerbaijani alphabet in favor of the Latin-based one.[244] In addition, in order to block any influence on its population from abroad, the Soviet authorities prohibited the dissemination of any publications produced by diasporas of the nationalities constituting the Soviet Union.[245] By contrast, the Soviet authorities used those diasporas in their propaganda abroad. These measures were the premises to further distinguishing between the Soviet domestic and foreign propaganda narratives.

The organization of atheism propaganda, the establishment of anti-Islamic narratives, and the ban on the Arabic-based Azerbaijani alphabet were the legacies of the early Soviet period in Azerbaijan. Even though the trend toward the secularization of Azerbaijani ideology started long before the Soviet period, the decisiveness of the Bolsheviks to push any religious appearances out of Azerbaijan's life, together with the harsh measures of the Bolshevik terror against a clergy and nationalists, ended the debate between Azerbaijani intellectuals about the role of Islam in Azerbaijani ideology. Islam was banned. In addition to that, Azerbaijan got the Latin-based alphabet, which local secularists considered as one of the symbols of Europeanization, and advocated for it before the establishment of the Soviet regime.

C. PROPAGANDA IN SOVIET AZERBAIJAN DURING WORLD WAR II AND AFTER

Soon after the beginning of World War II, the overall Soviet propaganda targeting the Soviet people was reshaped and included more stories addressing the narratives of patriotism, nationalism, and religion than ever before. In his first speech to the Soviet people as the war began, the Soviet leader Josef Stalin emphasized the victories of the Great Russian heroes of the past.[246] Yet the most critical shift happened in relation to religion. The Russian Orthodox Church targeted the remnants of the pious Orthodox population and disseminated the stories of the anti-Orthodoxy nature of Germany's plans, comparing those plans with other anti-Orthodox attacks, such as the

[244] In 1928, Turkey also adopted the Latin-based alphabet. Then, in 1939, the Communist government of Azerbaijan abandoned the Latin-based alphabet in favor of the Cyrillic-based one. Eventually in 1991, when Azerbaijan regained its independence, it readopted the Latin-based alphabet, symbolizing Azerbaijan's linguistic rapprochement to Turkey (or, according to some other opinions, to the Western world).

[245] Cornell, *Azerbaijan since Independence*, 53.

[246] Richard Overy, *Russia's War: A History of the Soviet War Effort, 1941–1945* (New York, NY: Penguin, 1997), 79.

Mongol conquests, historical Teutonic Knights' and Swedish attacks, as well as the Napoleonic invasion.[247] The patriotic songs called the Soviet people to the people's holy war, and the anti-religious institutions were dissolved. The Soviet Union needed narratives tailored to wider groups of people because it was the only way of total mobilization of its population.

Consequently, during World War II, Soviet authorities elaborated a new religious policy of the Soviet Union. To normalize the State's relationship with religion, the government dismantled anti-religious societies and in 1944 created the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults, which had a division related to Islam.[248] In the same year, the government of Soviet Azerbaijan created the Spiritual Administration of the Transcaucasia Muslims and authorized its control over the mosques in the republic.[249] Yet, in contrast to the Islamic Spiritual Administration of 1918, a Shi'a Muslim chaired the newly established institution, while a Sunni took the deputy position. Soviet authorities permitted the opening of Islamic schools, but then, arguing that there were no sufficient numbers of applicants in Azerbaijan, obliged local Shi'a scholars to study Sunni Islam in institutions functioning in Uzbekistan. Altstadt argues that after the mid-1950s the Soviet Union was interested in spreading its influence in the Middle East (including weapon sales to Arab states), so its authorities allowed a pilgrimage of some clergymen to Mecca and participation of Soviet Muslims in Islamic congresses.[250] By doing so in its propaganda targeting Islamic countries, the Soviet Union disseminated the narrative of its support for Islam. Meanwhile, despite some formal administrative latitudes domestically, the new religious policy was not supposed to allow Muslim clergy developing Islamic propaganda in the Soviet Union.

On the other hand, in Azerbaijan, emphasizing patriotism and national feelings in order to boost people's morale during World War II had unplanned implications after the war. During wartime, the patriotic propaganda of Soviet Azerbaijan appealed to the defense of the greater homeland, the Soviet Union, and dug into Azerbaijani cultural history.[251] This shift in propaganda

[247] Vladimyr Vasilyk, "O voyne i o pobede" [About the war and the victory], *Pravoslaviye.Ru*, May 9, 2011, accessed February, 27, 2018, http://www.pravoslavie.ru/46361.html.

[248] Riho Altnurme, "'Religious Cults, Particularly Lutheranism, in the Soviet Union in 1944–1949," *TRAMES* 6, no. 1 (March 2002): 4.

[249] Sattarov, *Islam, State, and Society in Independent Azerbaijan*, 58.

[250] Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks*, 163.

[251] Cornell, *Azerbaijan since Independence*, 56.

was not conceived to be a long-term policy because it could result in the increase of Azerbaijani nationalism, revealing to the population of Soviet Azerbaijan their cultural closeness to Turkic and Islamic civilizations, which possessed values incompatible with Communism. Thus, immediately after the war the government of Soviet Azerbaijan reversed wartime propaganda narratives.

Meanwhile, during the temporary Soviet occupation of the Iranian province of Southern Azerbaijan in 1946 Azerbaijanis in Iran and in the Soviet Union got opportunities to interact. Farideh Heyat states that despite the fact that contacts between Azerbaijanis could bolster the rise of their national awareness, the Soviet Union had to temporarily ease its restrictions as a part of its plans for unification of Southern Azerbaijan with Soviet Azerbaijan.[252] During that time, the Soviets supported independence aspirations of Azerbaijanis in Iran and the government of Soviet Azerbaijan played an important role in targeting Azerbaijanis in Iran. She further mentions that stories about cultural development in socialist Azerbaijan fascinated compatriots in Iran. Eventually, the Republic of South Azerbaijan failed in 1946, and numerous refugees fled to Soviet Azerbaijan.[253] Those refugees brought with them ideas of unification of the two Azerbaijans that bolstered the national feelings in Soviet Azerbaijan. Furthermore, during the "Khrushchev thaw"[254] of the 1950s, the new authorities of Soviet Azerbaijan succeeded in declaring Azerbaijani as the state language in the Constitution of Soviet Azerbaijan.[255] Azerbaijani writers of the period publicized works reflecting the idea of the national liberation movement in South Azerbaijan. In 1958, the government established in Soviet Azerbaijan a radio translation on Azerbaijani language targeting the Azerbaijani population of Iran.[256] The mentioned period largely encouraged discussions about national culture and values of Azerbaijan, as well as elaboration of narratives and stories related to the division of Azerbaijan into two parts in the 19th century and its unification.

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[252] Heyat, *Azeri Women in Transition*, 11.

[253] Cornell, *Azerbaijan since Independence*, 56.

[254] Khrushchev thaw – all-Soviet process that started in the mid-1950s and was characterized by easing of some harsh ideological and administrative restrictions of the Stalin period.

[255] Jamil Hasanli, *Khrushchev's Thaw and National Identity in Soviet Azerbaijan, 1954–1959* (London: Lexington Books, 2015), 427.

[256] Arif Yunusov, *Azerbaijan v Nachale 21 Veka: Konflikti I Potensialnie Ugrozi* [Azerbaijan in the Early 21st Century: Conflicts and Potential Threats] (Baku: Adiloglu, 2007), 60, http://elibrary.bsu.az/books_460/N_418.pdf.

Furthermore, in the 1950s in order to counter Islamism, the Soviet authorities of Azerbaijan used the propaganda of strictly Azerbaijan-oriented national narratives, once again (after the period of 1918–1920) giving credence to the formation of the propaganda of Azerbaijanism.[257] As a part of the anti-Islamic narrative targeting Azerbaijanis, Soviet propaganda encouraged studies about Azerbaijani figures who historically opposed Islam.[258] Important for Azerbaijani history and ethnography, the ancient epos *The Book of Dede Korkut,* which Soviet propaganda had previously considered pan-Islamic and pan-Turkic, was legitimized during the 1950s by citations from Karl Marx and references to ancient Russian tales.[259] Even though they arguably did not mean to propagate nationalism, Azerbaijani authorities who initiated those changes—the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan (CC CPA) Vali Mustafayev (who participated in the Soviet infrastructure projects during events in South Azerbaijan), the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet Mirza Ibrahimov (originally from South Azerbaijan), and even the head of the Propaganda Department of the CC CPA Shikhali Kurbanov—were replaced in 1959–1961, being labeled by the Soviet leaders as "nationalists and fascists."[260] Regardless of the initial aims of the dissemination of the stories about Azerbaijani historical figures, they contributed to fostering the national mentality of the whole generation of people of the 1950s. Later, some of those people used narratives and stories related to the independence movement in South Azerbaijan, as well as those related to Azerbaijanism, laying the foundation for the patriotism propaganda of the independent Republic of Azerbaijan.

After World War II, a variety of new features emerged in anti-religious propaganda in the Soviet Union and adopted in Azerbaijan as well. In 1954, a decree of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CC CPSU) criticized the dissemination of the narratives and stories insulting clergymen and people practicing religious ceremonies, and called for

[257] Sattarov, *Islam, State, and Society in Independent Azerbaijan,* 61.

[258] Such as a people's hero *Babak,* who fought against Islamic conquers, and the philosopher *Nasimi,* who propagated ideas not fitting into Islam. Both of them finally were executed by Islamic rulers of their time.

[259] Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks,* 171.

[260] Hasanli, *Khrushchev's Thaw,* 427.

scientifically valid propaganda aimed at citizens influenced by various religions.[261] In accordance with the decree, the Communist and Komsomol authorities of the Soviet republics, as well as the Ministries of Education and Labor Unions functioning in the republics, were put in charge of organizational work; additionally, the media was obliged to publish ideological materials.

In 1960, a newspaper operated by the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan published an article entitled "On the Reactionary Essence of Islam," attacking the foundation of the religion and portraying the Prophet as a plunderer.[262] Sometimes the theoretical articles in such key newspapers served as talking points for officials, party members, intellectuals, and an educated population. To emphasize the key message, the Communist Party's territorial organs or various representatives initiated discussions of those articles in work or education facilities. The Propaganda Department of the CC CPA attracted professors of university departments of "Scientific Communism" to conduct lectures. According to the aforementioned decree of 1954, the All-union Society for the Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge was made responsible for conducting propaganda of scientific atheism by organizing lectures and publicizing materials in its magazine *Science and Religion*. Beginning from the mid-1950s in order to prepare propagandists of scientific atheism, departments of the Religion and Atheism were established in the universities of the Soviet Union.[263] The Spiritual Administration of the Transcaucasia Muslims controlled the contents of prayers in Azerbaijani mosques, and, in accordance with the scientific approach, banned prayers against diseases, though they refrained from outlawing pirs.[264] These features of the government's anti-religious propaganda targeting local audiences had been practiced in Azerbaijan until the late 1980s and, apart from old-fashioned narratives of scientific atheism, continued to influence the organization of propaganda after the split of the Soviet Union during the period of independence.

[261] "No.39 Zapiska Otdela Propagandi i Agitasii CK KPSS po Soyuznim Respublikan O Nedostatkax Nauchno-Ateisticheskoy Propagandi" [CCCP's Propaganda and Agitation Department's Memorandum No.39, On Errors of Scientific-Atheistic Propaganda], Russian Association of Scholars in Religion, Last accessed March 2, 2018, https://rusoir.ru/03print/03print-02/03print-02-239/.

[262] Sattarov, *Islam, State, and Society in Independent Azerbaijan,* 60.

[263] Kseniya Kolkunova, "Ateisticheskaya Propaganda v Khudojestvennoy Literature 1950–1960-gg," [Propaganda of Atheism in Belles-Lettres of 1950–1960], *Vestnik PSTGU* 5 (49), (2013): 115, http://pstgu.ru/download/1386325368.7Kolkunova.pdf.

[264] Sattarov, *Islam, State, and Society in Independent Azerbaijan,* 60.

During the post-World War II Soviet period, the religious appeal of the local Azerbaijani clergy was limited in both the message and the medium; separate clergymen operated underground, using the stories describing various miracles and targeting pious and lay people. Historically, due to various forms of governmental suppressions, Shi'a and Sufi Islam have exploited similar esoteric concepts appealing to individual morality.[265] The narratives about miracles of curing various diseases by visiting sayyids[266] and pirs were merely the only ones disconnectedly disseminated by separate clergymen. Those narratives anchored Shi'a or Sufi, not Sunni, Islam. Generally, the custom of pilgrimages to the shrines of the Shi'a imams was instituted in the mid-900s as a part of Shi'a propaganda, based on the narrative that the imams can produce miracles.[267] Even though there are not any graves of the Shi'a imams in Azerbaijan, among the most significant pilgrimage sites were the graves of the seventh Shi'a imam, Musa Al-Kazim's daughters, Hokuma and Rahima, accordingly in the southern and northern outskirts of Baku. The Pir of Rahima in the village of Nardaran contributed to the high level of Shi'a-oriented piety among the villagers all through the Soviet period. The notion of miracles attracted vulnerable people to Shi'a sites, making them Shi'a by definition, even though most of them were not familiar with Shi'a concepts. In the totalitarian society, rumors were the available medium to spread those narratives. In its turn, because Sunni Islam does not recognize the divine role of Shi'a imams, Sunni clergymen in Azerbaijan could not produce and disseminate similar simple stories about miracles. Apparently, lacking a narrative of divine miracles by which to attract people became a weakness for the Sunni clergy during the Soviet period in Azerbaijan.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, it left to Azerbaijan a legacy of the secular society heavily affected by emerging nationalism. The Soviet foreign policy in support of Azerbaijani national irredentism in Iran in 1946 had a large influence on the formation of the ideology of a unified Azerbaijan. But at the same time, the totalitarian propaganda in Soviet Azerbaijan was abundant in its control over the media. Part of the Soviet legacy, such as the institutional

[265] Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, 90.

[266] In Shi'a tradition Sayyid is a descendant of the prophet Muhammad, who sometimes is capable of miracles and deserves particular regard.

[267] Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, 82.

framework of the government's propaganda, was not merely useless but also harmful to the future democratic development of Azerbaijan.

D. PROPAGANDA IN THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

Starting from the 1950s authorities of Soviet Azerbaijan had supported its writers and poets interest in South Azerbaijan. Jamil Hasanli points out that patriotic-themed Azerbaijani literature was born after Azerbaijani writer Bakhtiyar Vahabzade wrote his poem "Gulustan" in 1958.[268] The poem rejects the Gulustan agreement[269] and in an emotional way questions the right of foreign nations (Russia and Iran) to divide Azerbaijan, appealing to historical heroes such as Babak and *Koroglu,*[270] formulating the narrative that the Araz River divides the nation and introducing the narrative that Tabriz[271] is no less Azerbaijan than Baku is. Azerbaijani dissidence of the period went even further. The future leader of the People's Front of Azerbaijan, dissident and historian Abulfaz Elchibey, in 1973, speaking to a KGB investigator, openly admitted his goal of unifying the two Azerbaijans "after the collapse of the Soviet Union and Iran."[272] His ideas about the collapse of the Soviet Union, not those about the unification of Azerbaijans, resulted in his imprisonment for a few years under charges of anti-Soviet propaganda. Furthermore, Brenda Shaffer finds that speaking to the Writer Congress in 1981, the first secretary of the CC CPA, Heydar Aliyev, openly called for the propaganda of South Azerbaijani literature among local audiences in Soviet Azerbaijan.[273] She further argues that during the revolution in Iran in 1979, the press in Soviet Azerbaijan, in contrast to the general Soviet media, framed the events from the perspectives of language and cultural rights of Azerbaijanis in Iran. Eventually, by the time Azerbaijan became independent, literature and publications had already contributed to the formation of the narrative of unification of the Azerbaijans.

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[268] Hasanli, *Khrushchev's Thaw*, 429.

[269] As a result of Russian-Persian war, according to the Gulustan agreement of 1813, Azerbaijan was divided into two parts by the river of Araz, the northern part was integrated into Russian Empire, while the southern was left to Persia.

[270] Koroglu (the son of a blind man) is a heroic Robin Hood-like figure from Azerbaijani (and Turkic) folklore. He was a hero who sought to avenge a wrong and struggled against unjust rulers.

[271] Tabriz was a capital of the first historical Azerbaijani state in 16th century and has large cultural sense for Azerbaijani national identity. Now it is an administrative center of Iranian province of Eastern Azerbaijan.

[272] Hasanli, *Khrushchev's Thaw*, 437.

[273] Shaffer, *Borders and Brethren*, 104.

In 1991, the newly-independent Republic of Azerbaijan proclaimed itself the heir of the Azerbaijan People's Republic of 1918–1920 and readopted most of its symbols. Shaffer calls the first years of independence "highly charged ideologically."[274] Former dissident Abulfaz Elchibey became the leader of the People's Front of Azerbaijan, which, in 1989, declared in its program "developing cultural ties with Iranian Azerbaijan."[275] In 1987–1990, during the mass protests against Armenian allegations on Azerbaijani territories of Nagorno-Karabakh, Bakhtiyar Vahabzade often personally proclaimed "Gulustan," and the Azerbaijani singer from Iran, Yaghub Zurufchu, performed the song *Ayrilig* (separation) which was composed in 1957.[276] Later Elchibey went further and proclaimed that the pathway to the liberation of Nagorno-Karabakh comes through the liberation of Tabriz. During the short term of Elchibey's presidency in 1992–1993, he pushed forward an idea of producing movies about the national independence movement in South Azerbaijan. The hostile reaction of Iran was predictable. Thus, the subsequent governments of Azerbaijan were more cautious in their narratives related to South Azerbaijan. President of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev (1994–2003), called the Gulustan agreement a national tragedy and named the Republic of Azerbaijan a defender of the rights of Azerbaijanis throughout the world.[277] Since then Azerbaijan has organized several world congresses of Azerbaijanis and various cultural activities during which authorities have held the main narrative that the Republic of Azerbaijan is the heir of the Azerbaijan People's Republic, but at the same time, it is a homeland for all Azerbaijanis of the world.

Nevertheless, it was not the idea of unification of Azerbaijans but the threat of losing Nagorno-Karabakh that mobilized Azerbaijanis in the late 1980s. The Republic of Azerbaijan was established under the conditions of ongoing Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. Since then authorities of Azerbaijan have continuously conducted propaganda of patriotism targeting domestic audiences. In 1988 the Communist authorities of Azerbaijan not only opposed the separation of Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijan but also published articles in the Communist press about its

[274] Shaffer, *Borders and Brethren*, 156.

[275] Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks*, 205.

[276] "Ayrilig" means separation, referring to the separation of Azerbaijan.

[277] Shaffer, *Borders and Brethren*, 198.

historical belonging to Azerbaijan and its culture.[278] The subsequent national governments have made the narrative only stronger. Since the conflict started in 1987, the main narrative targeting both the population of Azerbaijan and generally the people of the world is that Azerbaijan is a victim of Armenian aggression, which must be punished.[279] It consists of smaller stories such as those about the annihilation of the culturally meaningful Topkhana forest by Armenian authorities in the Nagorno-Karabakh region in order to build an environmentally hostile aluminum plant in the vicinity of Azerbaijani settlements in 1987, the expulsion of Azerbaijanis from Armenia in 1988, the massacre perpetrated by Armenian forces against a civilian Azerbaijani population of the city of Khojaly in Nagorno-Karabakh in 1992, and ethnic cleansing and various atrocities committed by the Armenian military against Azerbaijanis during the war in Nagorno-Karabakh in 1992–1994. From the very first days of the independence of Azerbaijan, the patriotic narratives of government propaganda have anchored the defense of the territorial integrity.

The later stories in support of the main narrative grow in numbers as the conflict continues. Thomas De Waal describes them as "narratives of hatred" promoted by both parties of the conflict.[280] However, in relation to the Armenians as people, government propaganda in Azerbaijan has key narratives saying that "Azerbaijan is the homeland of Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh" and that "Armenians in Karabakh are different from those in Armenia, because they, like Azerbaijanis, emanate from the Caucasian Albanians."[281] Along with the protracted military conflict, the information war between Armenia and Azerbaijan has continued for years, introducing new stories in support of old narratives, new narratives, and counter-narratives from both sides. Lately, the propaganda of the government of Azerbaijan targeting the domestic audience has disseminated counter-narratives arguing that territories of today's Armenia historically belonged to Azerbaijan and conveying the message that Azerbaijanis expelled from Armenia in 1988 must be returned to their native lands.

[278] Shaffer, *Borders and Brethren*, 130.

[279] Thomas De Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 274.

[280] De Waal, *Black Garden*, 273.

[281] Shaffer, *Borders and Brethren*, 166.

Since independence, the successive governments of Azerbaijan have elaborated propaganda targeting domestic audiences and consisting of narratives of secularism, multiculturalism, and patriotism. The majority of these narratives anchor the historical development of Azerbaijani nationhood, in which the period of the Azerbaijan People's Republic of 1918–1920 has a great place. There are a lot of similarities in historical conditions and perceived threats to the country. For example, like it was in in 1918, Azerbaijan is in ethnic conflict with Armenia nowadays; as it was then, Russia supports Armenia. In addition, Russia, together with Iran, is hostile to the independence of Azerbaijan (and to its unification). The legacy of 27 years of independence under those conditions is that government of Azerbaijan has propagated narratives of patriotism to its population saying that in order to survive the perceived existential threats Azerbaijanis should be careful in their fair nationalistic aspirations toward Iran and justified anti-imperial sentiments toward Russia. At the same time, Azerbaijanis have to mobilize to support the government's policy aiming at a solution to the imminent threat, which is the Armenian occupation of Azerbaijani territories. The perceived existential threat to the nation mobilizes the national media in support of the government narratives of patriotism.

1. Propaganda in Countering Terrorism in Azerbaijan

Several times, during the 1980s, authorities of the Soviet Union considered that Azerbaijan might have faced a rise in Islamic Shi'a extremism. The first time it happened in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, given the significant role of Azerbaijanis in the overthrow of the Iranian Shah Reza Pahlavi.[282] During this time, a group of Nardaran villagers created an underground "Organization of Khomeini Supporters."[283] As a propaganda response, in 1982, the Azerbaijan newspaper *Communist* blamed Iran for Islamic propaganda in the Soviet republic and countered Islamism with national traditions.[284] A new anti-Islamic narrative of the time was related to Azerbaijan's pre-Islamic Zoroastrian roots. Years later, the central Soviet government pushed forward a similar narrative that the bloody intervention of the Soviet army in Baku on January 20, 1990, with the aim of suppressing the national independence movement, actually had a goal of

[282] Shaffer, *Borders and Brethren*, 84–85.

[283] Yunusov, *Azerbaijan v Nachale 21 Veka,* 61.

[284] Shaffer, *Borders and Brethren*, Shaffer, 110.

defeating Islamic extremism in Soviet Azerbaijan. This time, the leader of the Spiritual Administration of the Transcaucasia Muslims, Allahshukur Pashazade, in an open letter responded to the Secretary-General of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, pointing to the national character of the protests in Azerbaijan and stressing that "affiliation with any religion challenges nationalism."[285] In 1990, the political and religious authorities of Azerbaijan named the people who died as a result of the Soviet army's intervention *shahids* (martyrs). A *shahid* in Islam, though, is "a martyr who has died for the sake of God."[286] Arguably, this may demonstrate how secular nationalism appropriated religious narratives in Azerbaijan, and, moreover, traditional Shi'a and Sunni clergymen submitted to it.

The majority of cases of Shi'a radicalization in Azerbaijan were linked to Iran's influence, so in those cases, the counterterrorism communication of the government of Azerbaijan largely anchored narratives implicitly pointing out the tradition of Iranian hostility toward Azerbaijan. A retired security official said that in the 1990s, the Hezbollah terrorist organization's main efforts in Azerbaijan were to consolidate its popular support among Shi'a youth.[287] Furthermore, in February 1997, members of Hezbollah assassinated Azerbaijani academician Ziya Bunyatov, whom they considered to be an agent of the Israeli Mossad and a propagator of Zionism in Azerbaijan.[288] Several times Iran-oriented[289] "Azerbaijan Islamic Party" representatives were charged with spying for Iran and sending youngsters to military training in that country (1996),[290] aiming to overthrow the legitimate authorities and establish Shari'a rule in Azerbaijan (2002),[291]

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[285] Sattarov, *Islam, State, and Society in Independent Azerbaijan*, 82.

[286] Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, 22.

[287] Ismayil, "Azerbaijan Hizbullahin Hedefinde Deyil" [Hizbullah Does not Target Azerbaijan], *Sherg*, September 29, 2017, http://www.sherg.az/site/id-37160/%3Cfont_color=red%3E_Az%C9%99rbaycan_%E2%80%9CHizbullah%E2%80%9D%C4%B1n_h%C9%99d%C9%99find%C9%99_deyil%3C/font%3E#.WpxKUujwbn0.

[288] Anar Valiyev, "Azerbaijan: Islam in a Post-Soviet Republic," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 9, no. 4 (2005): 3, http://www.rubincenter.org/2005/12/valiyev-2005-12-01/.

[289] Raoul Motika, "Islam in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan," *Archives De Sciences Sociales des Religions* 46, no. 115 (2001): 119, http://www.jstor.org/stable/30127240.

[290] Motika, "Islam in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan," 119.

[291] "Azerbaijan Report," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, June 7, 2002, https://www.rferl.org/a/1340797.html.

and plotting a terrorist act and attempting to seize power illegally (2011).[292] Each time media campaigns followed the arrests and trials, yet the media mainly repeated the charges without trying to counter the narratives of the Islamists. State-owned media disseminated narratives that a foreign country (sometimes Iran was mentioned openly) directed the "Azerbaijan Islamic Party" leadership.[293] Arguably, authorities presumed that if they linked narratives of the Islamists to Iran, those narratives would not resonate with the majority of people in Azerbaijan.

In addition to that, the press spread the appeal of the Administration of the Caucasus Muslims (the successor to the Spiritual Administration of the Transcaucasia Muslims) in support of the national interests of Azerbaijan. In November 2015, the Shi'a group "Muslim Unity," based in a village of Nardaran, was accused of acting as an underground religious terrorist group inciting revolts with the aim of creating a Shari'a state.[294] By 2015, the village of Nardaran became a sort of island of pro-Iranian Shi'a radicalization in Azerbaijan. Graffiti-scarred walls in Nardaran read "God is the greatest," and despite the ban on the hijab in the schools of Azerbaijan, in Nardaran girls went to schools covered in a hijab.[295] In addition to that, during people's rallies in Nardaran, villagers burned flags of the United States, France (as a result of publications in Charlie Hebdo), Israel, and Armenia (because it destroyed mosques in occupied territories), protesting the denigration of Islamic symbols in Western media.[296] This time after the law enforcement operation, the government's media campaign was followed by the announced organization of secular life in the village, including conducting several infrastructure and education projects in Nardaran, in order to reduce popular support for the radicals.

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[292] "Islamic Party of Azerbaijan Head Jailed For 12 Years," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, October 7, 2002, https://www.rferl.org/a/islamic_party_of_azerbaijan_head_jailed_for_12_years/24352745.html.

[293] Aliguismat Badalov, Rauf Aliyev, "Radikal Dini Ekstremist Gruplarin Sabitliyin Pozulmasina Yonelmish Qanunsuz Emellerin Garshisi Getiyyetle Alinmalidir" [The Illegal Activities of Radical Religious Groups Aiming at Destabilization Must be Decisively Prevented], *Xalg Gazeti*, January 19, 2011, http://xalqqazeti.com/az/news/social/8824.

[294] "Suspected Shi'ite Insurgent Group On Trial in Azerbaijan," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, August 14, 2016, https://www.rferl.org/a/caucasus-report-azerbaijan-shiite-trial-link-extremism-to-opposition/27920594.html.

[295] Gulnar Salimova, "Nardaran, A Different Space in Azerbaijan," *Meydan TV*, July 30, 2015, https://www.meydan.tv/en/site/society/7204/.

[296] Aziz Karimov, "Residents of the Village of Nardaran Burn the Flags of France, Israel and the U.S.," *CNN IReport*, January 21, 2015, http://ireport.cnn.com/docs/DOC-1208314.

Generally, the narratives of government propaganda in Azerbaijan against Shi'a radicalism have been constructed so as not to blame Shi'ism but the anti-Azerbaijan policy of Iran. Interesting, but a trend of distinguishing Shi'ism from Iran is not new for Azerbaijan. Beginning from the 19th century Azerbaijani Shi'as followed ethnically Azerbaijani Shi'a religious authorities rather than Persian ones.[297] The Soviet anti-religious policy left Azerbaijan without its own educated Shi'a religious authorities. Even though no official census of Shi'as has been conducted in Azerbaijan, according to the evaluations of the Administration of the Caucasus Muslims, Shi'as constitute up to 65 percent of all Muslims in the country.[298] Given the need to hold back pro-Iranian Shi'ism, Azerbaijani authorities did not oppose the proselytism of Turkish Sunni groups, including those affiliated with Fethullah Gulen.[299] Moreover, the Salafi community in Azerbaijan even tried to adjust the government's anti-Iran stories to Salafi's anti-Shia propaganda, using the radical Salafi narratives about paganism inherent in Shi'ism.[300] Some representatives of the Salafi clergy in Azerbaijan expressed their disapproval that the media in Azerbaijan did not publish articles about groups of Azerbaijani Shi'as allegedly fighting together with Iranian groups in Syria on the side of the Asad regime.[301] Meanwhile, they argued that Azerbaijani media paid undue attention to Salafi radicals from Azerbaijan who joined ISIS in Syria. Arguably, linking political activists of Islam to Iran may effectively reduce the level of their popular support, due to the widespread suspicions in Azerbaijan about Iran's religious rule. From the other side, by 2001 Azerbaijan had closed Iranian religious schools in the country and reportedly had agreed with Iran that it would suspend its proselytism targeting Azerbaijani citizens.[302] Eventually, the government faced fewer challenges in countering pro-Iranian Shi'a propaganda because of that. Domestically in

[297] Shaffer, *Borders and Brethren*, 29.

[298] "Allahshukur Pashazade: Azerbaijanda 35 faiz sunni, 65 faiz ise shie mezhebine mensub insanlarin yashadighi ehtimal edilir" [Allahshukur Pashazade: admittedly, there are 35% Sunni and 65% Shi'a living in Azerbaijan], *Report.az*, February 14, 2015, https://report.az/din/allahsukur-pasazade-azerbaycanda-35-faiz-sunni-65-faiz-ise-sie.

[299] Bayram Balci, "Between Sunnism and Shiism: Islam in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan," *Central Asian Survey* 23, no.2 (2010): 212, https://doi.org/10.1080/02634930410001310544.

[300] Motika, "Islam in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan," 114, 120.

[301] Kenan, "Esed terefden doyushen Azerbaijanlilar var mi?" [Are There Azerbaijanis Fighting in Asad's Part?], *Musavat*, December, 10, 2014, http://musavat.com/news/gundem/esed-terefden-doyushen-azerbaycanlilar-varmi_182358.html.

[302] International Crises Group, *Azerbaijan: Independent Islam and The State*, Report No. 191 (Europe: 2008), https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/191-azerbaijan-independent-islam-and-the-state.pdf.

Azerbaijan, Shi'a ideology may be radical or even threatening, given the possibility of open mass riots, but it was not a concealed terrorist threat.

In addition to Shi'a radicalization, during the early 1990s, the history of Salafi infiltration of Azerbaijan started. This history was related to the charitable organizations from the Gulf countries that began their relief and educational programs in the republic. Charitable foundations from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates provided humanitarian aid to Azerbaijani refugees, organized religious courses, and supported religious education of Azerbaijanis in Islamic universities abroad.[303] After they received their Islamic education, those Azerbaijanis organized the first Salafi groups in Azerbaijan. In 1997, the Kuwaiti charitable organization "Revival of the Islamic Heritage" financed the construction of the Abu Bakr mosque in Baku, where Azerbaijani Salafists formed their own community.

During the same period, Salafi militants infiltrated the wider region of the Caucasus, particularly because they took part in the insurgency in Russia's Republic of Chechnya in the Northern Caucasus. The population of Azerbaijani regions bordering the Northern Caucasus traditionally follows a Sunni branch of Islam. This made them particularly prone to Salafi propaganda, including the one disseminating narratives of jihad in Chechnya. The flow of radical Salafists (known as militant Wahhabis) from the Northern Caucasus, as a result of Russian military actions against Chechens during 1999–2000, was enforced with the rise in financial aid from the Gulf countries to the Salafi community in Azerbaijan.[304] At the same time, in 1995, a citizen of Egypt, Ibrahim Eidarous, established in Azerbaijan the first jihadist cell, which later merged with al-Qaeda.[305] Azerbaijani security forces followed the jihadist infiltration of the country, banned activities of several charitable foundations and in 1998, together with the Central Intelligence Agency, arrested a jihadist from Egypt, Ahmed Mabrouk. Between 1999 and 2001, Azerbaijani security forces revealed activities of Salafi terrorist organizations as *Jeyshullah* (Army of God) and *Hizb ut-Tahrir*.[306] Investigations revealed that radical Salafists did not limit their activities to support of the Chechen rebels: they planned terrorist acts in Azerbaijan as well.

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[303] Gasimov, "Multimodal Salafi Engagement with Digital Media in Azerbaijan."

[304] Valiyev, "Azerbaijan: Islam in a Post-Soviet Republic," 5.

[305] International Crises Group, *Azerbaijan: Independent Islam and The State.*

[306] International Crises Group, *Azerbaijan: Independent Islam and The State.*

The extradition of some of the terrorists and local trials of others required the authorities to explain to the population the threat that radical Salafism posed to Azerbaijan. In 2001, officials of the Ministry of National Security spoke about the danger of the spread of Wahhabism in Azerbaijan, and the media disseminated stories about visitors to the Abu Bakr mosque who later fought in jihad in Chechnya.[307] After 9/11, the government of Azerbaijan crushed the Salafi communities, and several smaller mosques were closed instantly. Yet the larger one, Abu Bakr, functioned up to 2008 when it was also closed. The reason behind the closure was that a group of Salafi-jihadists attempted to blow up the mosque as a part of their terrorist plot against other Salafists, who did not support militancy. The society in Azerbaijan in general and the media, in particular, are not very familiar with the differences between Salafism and Wahhabism. Even though Wahhabis follow Salafi Islam, it is their understanding of methods for realization of Salafi ideas that can lead to jihad.[308] However, from that period, with more or less intensity, the media in Azerbaijan generally framed any Salafi activities as radicalism, often naming Salafism as Wahhabism.

In recent years, al-Qaeda and ISIS have recruited some adherents of the Salafi branch from Azerbaijan. By 2017, about 900 citizens of Azerbaijan had joined the terrorist organizations.[309] Eighty-four of them returned to Azerbaijan and were arrested. Another 54 of them were deprived of their citizenship. Some citizens of Azerbaijan fought in the Northern Caucasus, then took high positions in the hierarchy of terrorists in Afghanistan and in late 2012 appeared in Syria.[310] In the late 2000s, experienced jihadists directed homegrown radical and extremist groups. According to various sources, Salafi clergymen in mosques played a significant role in the recruitment of jihadists in Azerbaijan, some of whom were promised money for participation in ISIS, as well as compensation for their families in the case of death.[311] The same source states that on a video

[307] Sattarov, *Islam, State, and Society in Independent Azerbaijan*, 254–55.

[308] Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, 22.

[309] "Madat Guliyev: About 900 Azerbaijani citizens joined terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq," Info.az, March 03, 2017, http://www.infoaz.org/new/index.php/en/manset-eng/49686-color-red-madat-guliyev-about-900-azerbaijani-citizens-joined-terrorist-groups-in-syria-and-iraq.

[310] "Azerbaijani Foreign Fighters in Syria," Turan Information Agency, October 7, 2014, LexisNexis.

[311] Anton Bredikhin, "IG otstupayet v Azerbaijan" [IS Retreats to Azerbaijan], *Scientific Society of Caucasian Scholars*, November 06, 2015, http://www.kavkazoved.info/news/2015/11/06/ig-otstupaet-v-azerbajdzhan.html; Turan Information Agency, "Azerbaijani Foreign Fighters in Syria."

disseminated on the Internet, a jihadist from Azerbaijan argued that harsh repression of Salafists in Azerbaijan forced some of them to escape to Syria and fight along with ISIS. Some Azerbaijani scholars agree that economic grievances and unemployment are among the key causes of an increase in ISIS recruitment among Azerbaijanis.[312]

Azerbaijan's set of policies countering terrorism include legislative measures limiting dissemination of religious radicalism and government propaganda targeting youth and impoverished people. The legislative measures such as a ban on foreigners conducting religious propaganda in Azerbaijan, the compulsory registration of religious communities by the State Committee for Work with Religious Organizations, and control over religious education by the Administration of the Caucasus Muslims have reduced the opportunities for radical Islamic propaganda to find a receptive audience.[313] The government focuses on conducting educational programs that can address the ground for Islamic radicalization, but Azerbaijan lacks programs and preventive measures countering radicalization.

The use of propaganda in countering terrorism is a new realm for the Republic of Azerbaijan. Arguably, since 2013 law enforcement has promoted publicity about some Salafists who have spoken against jihad in Syria. For example, in 2014, at least two former jihadists surprisingly did not encounter legal problems when they returned to Azerbaijan, and at the same time, they spoke to the media about their disillusionment because of robberies, murders, and rapes committed by ISIS.[314] In 2013, the local Salafi clergyman Gamet Suleymanov gave an interview for an article in support of countering the jihad narrative, saying that "those who die in Syria can possibly not be considered martyrs because they did not follow all the rules associated with martyrdom (such as asking their parents for permission)."[315] Another story in support of the same counterterrorism narrative said that Azerbaijanis should refrain from joining the jihad in Syria and better wait until the just war for the liberation of Nagorno-Karabakh started.

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[312] Eric Jones, "Azerbaijan Assesses the Growing Threat of ISIS," *Sofrep News*, December, 11, 2014, https://sofrep.com/37831/azerbaijan-assesses-growing-threat-isis/.

[313] "Secularism in Azerbaijan and the Threat of Radicalization in the Region," European Foundation for Democracy, June 16, 2015, http://europeandemocracy.eu/2015/06/secularism-in-azerbaijan-and-the-threat-of-radicalisation-in-the-region/.

[314] Turan Information Agency, "Azerbaijani Foreign Fighters in Syria."

[315] Turan Information Agency, "Azerbaijani Foreign Fighters in Syria."

Within the last few years, larger measures to increase public awareness about the radicalization threat were introduced under the auspices of the State Security Service. In March 2017, a conference on "The Role of The Youth in the Fight against Terrorism, Extremism and Radicalism" was held in Baku, where the representatives of the State Security Service, the Youth Fund under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Youth and Sport, and the State Committee for Work with Religious Organizations discussed their responsibilities in countering religious radicalism.[316] The role of youth was mainly defined as a promotion of religious awareness and countering radical propaganda among vulnerable populations. Because the government considers the distortion of traditional religious dogma by al-Qaeda and ISIS as the main cause of terrorists' ideological inspiration,[317] the government's propaganda is focused on countering that distortion. Countering religious extremism and the ideologies of terrorist organizations is perceived as the most important part of counterterrorism policies in Azerbaijan.

2. Salafi Propaganda in Azerbaijan

The key narratives of Salafi propaganda in Azerbaijan anchor the anti-Shi'a sentiment of Salafism; but, at the same time, informal Salafi leaders have to be especially cautious in a Shi'a majority country when using particular narratives. This thesis supports the view that there are three major Salafi factions: "the purists, politicos, and jihadists," yet "the splits are about contextual analysis, not belief."[318] Salafi ideology requires humans to obey Shari'a throughout their entire life, rejecting the separation of religion from the state, which is a pillar of Azerbaijan's constitution. Purists in Azerbaijan operate openly and their unofficial leader, Gamet Suleymanov, indignantly opposes being associated with Wahhabis.[319] When he comments about a daily application of Salafi rules, he often touches on sensitive issues like justice and bribes. Yet, Suleymanov does not

[316] Azerbaijan State News Agency, "Bakida terrorchuluga, ekstremizme ve radikalizme garsi."

[317] "Madat Guliyev: Religious Extremism, Increasingly Hardly Distinguishable from Terrorism Became a Great Danger to the World," Report.Az, May 20, 2016, https://report.az/en/incident/madat-guliyev-religious-extremism-increasingly-hardly-distinguishable-from-terrorism-become-a-gre.

[318] Quintan Wiktorowiczq, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29, (2006): 208, https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100500497004.

[319] "Biza Wahhabi Deyanlar" [Those who call us Wahhabis], YouTube video, 1:00, posted by As-Salih, November 25, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1SaYKHR9EMQ.

emphasize "the application of the Salafi creed to the political arena,"[320] inherent to the politicos, as a solution for societal problems in Azerbaijan. Arguably, because of the Azerbaijani government's intolerance toward any interference of religion into politics, the politicos, even if they existed in Azerbaijan, could hardly openly propagate their credo.

Salafi ideology opposes particular traditions that are deeply rooted in Azerbaijan. One of the Salafi pillars—the rejection of "worshipping others than God (*shirk*)"[321]—in Azerbaijan immediately challenges the foundations of traditional Shi'a Islam, such as the imams and pirs. What is even more important, unlike the cautious Shi'a clergymen in Azerbaijan, the Salafi notion of *shirk* unambiguously denies some Azerbaijani key traditions originally rooted in pre-Islamic Turkic culture or Zoroastrianism (for example, Nowruz).[322] Such conflictual propaganda messages are disseminated through the video appeals of the ideologists of global Salafism, translated into the Azerbaijani language. Unlike its anti-Shia narrative, the global anti-Iran narrative of the Salafi movement is not as alien to Azerbaijani audiences. Iran is fairly blamed for heavily supporting an aggressor—Armenia. Although this narrative is not voiced openly by government officials in Azerbaijan, it can be heard in a majority of independent media. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia is depicted in line with cooperative relations and aid programs to Azerbaijan.[323] Unlike Iran, Saudi Arabia, in solidarity with Azerbaijan, "doesn't have diplomatic relations with Armenia."[324] In Azerbaijan, there are several Internet news outlets, allegedly supported by Salafists, which frame the news to undermine the policy of Iran or present negative stories related to it. The Salafi media pretend Azerbaijani Salafists' loyalty to the authorities. Unofficial Salafi leaders residing in Azerbaijan have to craft their propaganda in consideration of the prevailing views of Azerbaijanis.

[320] Wiktorowiczq, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," 208.

[321] Wiktorowiczq, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," 209.

[322] The celebration of the coming of spring—Nowruz—is followed with honoring the elements of nature as water, wind, fire, and earth. Particular Nowruz cookies symbolize the Sun, during the celebration people jump over the fire. Nowruz is the most popular holiday in Azerbaijan, where its celebration also integrates some traditional pre-Islamic Turkic folklore characters. General wisdom says the celebration of Nowruz in Azerbaijan has been the largest in scale in comparison with other nations celebrating this holiday (Turkic states, Iran, and the Central Asian nations).

[323] Gasimov, "Multimodal Salafi Engagement with Digital Media in Azerbaijan."

[324] "Bilaterial Relations: Saudi Arabia," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Armenia*, last updated July 2010, http://www.mfa.am/en/country-by-country/sa/.

In their turn, the narratives of jihadists targeting the Azerbaijani population are entirely political and anti-government. First of all, their emphasis on *al-Wala wa-l-Bara* makes jihadists different from other Salafists,[325] because it rejects religious tolerance, one of the pillars of government propaganda in Azerbaijan. Yet al-Qaeda's jihadist appeal varies from that of ISIS. In 2015, for example, one of the Azerbaijani fighters of an al-Qaeda affiliated group in Syria declared that their aim in Azerbaijan was to propagate Islam, not to make jihad.[326] Generally, Azerbaijani fighters in ISIS have also called their supporters to join the jihad in Syria,[327] reflecting the official ISIS propaganda narrative about the alluring caliphate. At the same time, however, some Azerbaijani ISIS members, via social networks, have openly threatened Shi'as in Azerbaijan, called them apostates, and invited other Azerbaijani Salafists to fight them in the country.[328] Terrorist threats to assassinate particular Shi'a clergymen have also been made.[329] Jihadist adepts promised to destroy Shi'a pirs in Azerbaijan and justified the destruction of mosques by Armenians in occupied Karabakh because those mosques were named after Shi'a imams. Furthermore, some jihadists accused Azerbaijani Salafists who refused to join ISIS of infidelity as well.[330] Arguably, such an extremist propaganda not only faces the most severe response from the authorities, but it also meets resistance from the hearts and minds of its intended audience, unless that audience is already radicalized.

At the present time, the only Salafi propaganda tolerated by Azerbaijani authorities is that controlled by Gamet Suleymanov, the unofficial Salafi leader, which centers on education and purification. During the early 1990s, his Friday sermons and lectures and those of some other Salafi preachers were disseminated on CDs.[331] In 2003, informal Salafi groups in Azerbaijan

[325] Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, 15.

[326] "Azerbaijanda jihad planlarimiz yoxdur" [We Do not Plan Jihad in Azerbaijan], Dia.az, August 04, 2015, http://www.dia.az/8/80499-azerbaycanda-cihad-planimiz-yoxdur.html.

[327]"New video message from Islamic State of Iraq and al-Shām: From Azerbaijan," Jihadology, April 30, 2014, http://jihadology.net/2014/04/30/new-video-message-from-islamic-state-of-iraq-and-al-sham-from-azerbaijan/.

[328] "Wahhabi Threat Reported against Azeri Shi'is on Social Media," BBC Monitoring Trans Caucasus Unit, February 15, 2014, LexisNexis.

[329] "Facebook User Threatens Shi'i Azeris with Reprisals," BBC Monitoring Trans Caucasus Unit, October, 26, 2013, LexisNexis.

[330] "Why and for What Are Azerbaijani Citizens Fighting in Syria?" Turan Information Agency, January 14, 2014, LexisNexis.

[331] Gasimov, "Multimodal Salafi Engagement with Digital Media in Azerbaijan."

established an online forum for the Abu Bakr mosque. In time, social media became an important way of communicating Salafi ideas in Azerbaijan. The closure of Salafi mosques was followed by the introduction of a practice whereby Salafi propagandists traveled around the country and met with their supporters personally.[332] These meetings were recorded and placed on the Internet. Eventually, in 2014, an Internet news agency, *Salaf Xeber*, under the control of Gamet Suleymanov was created in Azerbaijan. He claimed that the Salafists in Azerbaijan needed their own news media because the domestic media sometimes distorted their interviews.[333] Through the Internet news portal *Salaf Xeber* and YouTube channel, materials prepared under Gamet Suleymanov's control,[334] his personal speeches in mosques and videos, where he answers questions of his supporters, target domestic audiences in Azerbaijan.

Nevertheless, Salafi-jihadists could hardly be allowed to operate as openly as the purist Salafists did. Because many Azerbaijanis speak Turkish and Russian, however, they were able to access much of the jihadist online propaganda.[335] During the heyday of ISIS from 2012 to 2014, a number of videos of Azerbaijani jihadists appealing to their compatriots and promoting life in the caliphate were disseminated online. The media in Azerbaijan does not broadcast jihadists' videos, because it may be considered propagating appeals to terrorism; thus, social networks continue to be the only way for jihadists to reach potential supporters.

E. CONCLUSION

This chapter examined the historical development of propaganda during the Azerbaijan People's Republic of 1918–1920, Soviet Azerbaijan of 1920–1991, and the Republic of Azerbaijan after 1991. The research followed the roots of government relations with Islam as a way to reveal the emergence of the ideology of Azerbaijanism and the narratives of patriotism, multiculturalism, and religious tolerance in the Republic of Azerbaijan.

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[332] Gasimov, "Multimodal Salafi Engagement with Digital Media in Azerbaijan."

[333] "Salafi xeber: Dovlet bashchisini tengid etmek olmaz" [Selef xeber: One should not criticize the head of the state], RFE/RL, June 25, 2014, https://www.azadliq.org/a/25434764.html.

[334] In a variety of publications related to the Islamic issues placed on the Salaf Xabar site, http://selefxeber.az/, the authors make special note that the material was prepared under the direction and control of Gamet Suleymanov.

[335] "Azerbaijani Foreign Fighters in Syria," *Turan Information Agency*, October 7, 2014, LexisNexis.

Turkism, Modernism, and Islamism underlie the fundamental ideology of Azerbaijan. During the short period of independence in 1918–1920, the national government concluded previous debates and proclaimed the secular character of Azerbaijani statehood while also recognizing the right to appeal to the traditional Shi'a and Sunni branches of Islam, as well as other non-Islamic religions. The authorities of Soviet Azerbaijan initially exploited the foundations of secularism left from the national government.

One of the main lessons that the anti-religious propaganda of Soviet Azerbaijan reveals is that appeals to rationality are not very useful in countering emotional beliefs in God. The communist authorities of Azerbaijan formulated narratives of atheism, modernization, enlightenment, and emancipation; nevertheless, people (including communists) continued to visit pirs and conduct parallel Islamic ceremonies during marriages and funerals. Communists deprived clergymen of mosques—Islam "went underground"[336]—and its propaganda relied on rumors, becoming even less vulnerable to the state apparatus. Arguably, the goal of Soviet Azerbaijan propaganda—a total elimination of religion from Azerbaijani society—was unreachable; moreover, the use of scientific atheism as an anchor for propaganda narratives intended to convince the public to abandon their religious practices and belief was not effective.

At the same time, the anti-religious propaganda of the Soviet Union reinforced the national realm of Azerbaijani ideology. The Soviets exploited Azerbaijani culture and nationalism and supported Azerbaijani irredentism in Iran, even with no success in separating South Azerbaijan from Iran in 1946. However, by playing with Azerbaijani nationalism in the interests of foreign policy, the Soviet Union largely contributed to the growth of Azerbaijani national culture domestically. After that, propaganda in Soviet Azerbaijan and subsequently in independent Azerbaijan has always included narratives related to the unity of Azerbaijanis living on both sides of the divisive Araz River. Armenian aggression against Azerbaijan made the propaganda of patriotism an important policy for Azerbaijani governments. Meanwhile, its narratives related to ethnic conflict anchor the notions of the Azerbaijan People's Republic, which respected all the religious and ethnic groups inhabiting Azerbaijan.

[336] Sattarov, *Islam, State, and Society in Independent Azerbaijan*, 70.

The state propaganda for countering terrorism in Azerbaijan addresses various threats from religious extremism. The policy of exporting the Islamic revolution from neighboring Iran, together with common religious grounds, presents a risk of Shi'a radicalization. However, the sense of nationalism of Azerbaijanis is the key obstacle preventing the export of Iranian ideas to Azerbaijan. In contrast, narratives of Azerbaijani national propaganda, if they targeted Azerbaijanis in Iran, may gain more success. Salafi extremism and jihadist propaganda are immediate dangers for Azerbaijan. Even purist Salafi propaganda narratives challenge the peaceful coexistence of various branches of Islam and other religions in Azerbaijan. Overall, the informational realm in Azerbaijan does not favor Salafism. Although this is due in part to past and current government activities, it is mainly due to cultural alienation and the frequently expressed view that Salafism is linked directly to the atrocities committed by ISIS. The government understands the necessity of preventive ideological measures against radicalization. But, addressing the rise of ISIS propaganda requires more sophisticated policies incorporating the experience of advanced counterterrorism practices.

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IV. ANALYSIS

This chapter compares and contrasts the historical development of strategic communication targeting domestic audiences in the United States and Azerbaijan and the application of these methods in counterterrorism policies of the respective countries. Furthermore, the analysis highlights the weak and strong points in each of the cases. Therefore, the chapter starts by synthesizing strategic communication in the United States, followed by a synthesis of propaganda in Azerbaijan. I draw policy parallels and divisions in order to find which common and different applications are present in the respective countries. Then I elaborate on the general approaches that can help strengthen strategic communication in countering terrorism that targets domestic audiences.

The policy of domestic-oriented strategic communication in the United States developed during the World Wars of the 20th century and became an important tool in countering terrorism in the 21st century. The values of American liberty restrained the federal government from the wider application of domestic- oriented propaganda. Threats of homegrown Islamic radicalization, however, made American policy makers recognize the need for particular government institutions to use strategic communication targeting the American audience in order to make the country safer from ISIS. As a result, the United States worked out its institutional framework and democratic restraints on a policy of strategic communication targeting domestic audiences.

In the 20th century, under various political regimes, the governments of Azerbaijan conducted propaganda campaigns targeting domestic audiences in order to, among other aims, influence the local population's attitudes toward Islam. Eventually, Azerbaijan developed narratives of religious tolerance. At the same time, domestic propaganda in Azerbaijan largely developed its framework under totalitarianism. Because Azerbaijan faces what is perceived to be

an existential threat to its statehood,[337] the news media is highly compliant with the government's calls to patriotism-supportive coverage. However, the perceived existential threats do not include the religious radicalization leading to terrorist recruitment. Thus in addition to its narratives, Azerbaijani may need application of experiences from advanced countries in how to build a functional institutional framework of domestic propaganda countering terrorist recruitment.

A. SYNTHESIS OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION COUNTERING TERRORISM IN THE UNITED STATES

During the 20th century, the American policy makers had alternately allowed and then restricted federal agencies from employing strategic communication directed at domestic audiences. In particular, when the United States was at war, the need for strategic communication targeting domestic audiences was urgent. During those periods, the American government enhanced the set of policies that later defined strategic communication. During the interwar period, the American public continuously disavowed their government's use of propaganda domestically, but scholars preserved the valuable experience and practice gained by the CPI and OWI. Then, when the U.S. Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948 (the Smith–Mundt Act) officially delegitimized the American government's use of propaganda domestically, major news media and commercial businesses stepped in to produce domestic propaganda instead. Being constrained to target only foreign audiences, the American government's strategic communication shifted its focus and continued to evolve, particularly in relation to adjusting American narratives directed at various cultures of different nation-states.

During the two World Wars, strategic communication established itself as a complement to conventional warfare. During the Cold War, strategic communication became a separate type of warfare, a war of ideas, which promised far less devastation than a nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union. The United States reached the period of the War on Terror

[337] The set of perceived existential threats includes Russia backed Armenian aggression, and Russia, Iran, and Armenia warmed up ethnic separatism among minority nationalities residing in Azerbaijan. The three countries have organized cooperative activities targeting the Lezgins, Avars, and Talishs of Azerbaijan. From time to time, these countries have organized pseudo-scientific conferences, where a few of representatives of Azerbaijani national minorities have raised their own cases of irredentism. Even though, ethnic separatism is not popular among the Lezgins, Avars, and Talishs residing in Azerbaijan, according to general perceptions, in case of the separation of the Armenian populated territories, irredentism may be triggered by the aforementioned three countries in other regions of Azerbaijan as well. This eventually would challenge the existence of Azerbaijani nation statehood per se.

with the legacy of strategic communication limited to targeting foreign audiences. Initially, American strategic communication targeting the general public was a part of the attack on terrorism. The United States disseminated the clear narrative that it was going to fight terrorism around the world and the American military supported it. The United States has won significant victories over al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and ISIS in Syria, imprisoned or killed "scoundrels," such as Khalid Mohammed, Osama bin Laden, Anwar al-Awlaki, and other leaders and propagandists of al-Qaeda and ISIS. At the same time, the War on Terror has required American policy makers and legislators to reassess the application of strategic communication relative to new threats posed by the penetration of radical and violent ideology into American society.

That being the case, the rise of jihadist propaganda that promotes violent extremism has changed the American model of strategic communication targeting domestic audiences during short periods of crises. In recognition of the Department of State's overseas efforts aiming to counter the propaganda of Islamic radicalization, in 2012, the U.S. Congress modernized the Smith–Mundt Act and authorized the domestic dissemination of information prepared by the Department of State for foreign audiences. Government-controlled strategic communication targeting the domestic American audience soon forced its way into becoming legitimate policy under a variety of definitions, such as "global engagement," "community partnership" and "countering violent extremism efforts." Now, U.S. federal agencies such as the Department of State, the FBI, and DHS have authorities and operate bodies which, in one way or another, deliberately disseminate information among American residents in the interests of the wider counterterrorism perspective.

Furthermore, the emergence of ISIS has complicated the American counterterrorist response, whose appeal must be greater than the tactics of inspiration employed by terrorists. ISIS's practice of online propaganda and recruitment in social networks sufficiently reduced the need for terrorist-recruiters to meet with their targets in person while still maintaining a sense of immediacy. Despite its recent military losses, for example, ISIS preserves its inspiration-based power. The American government recognizes that even after the loss of territories, ISIS will

continue to present a terrorist threat to the United States.[338] Propaganda materials produced by ISIS ideologists have continued to inspire potential supporters to terrorism in the United States even after those ideologists were physically destroyed by the U.S. military. Undoubtedly, the application of the American military force and its intelligence capabilities will lead to the physical defeat of larger terrorist structures. On the other hand, the inspirational legacy of ISIS has widened the separate front of counterterrorism: the war on violent ideas.[339] Arguably, there is a narrative of hope in the radical Islamists' saying that "America can never kill ideas of al-Awlaki."[340] Indeed, the war on ideas is going to continue for a longer time because ideas do not die promptly together with their authors.

On the other hand, ideas might lose their attractiveness if they are consciously and effectively undermined. It requires from the United States coordinated activities incorporating legislative support and the experience of law enforcement agencies, the Intelligence Community, and think tanks. Countering violent ideas among American residents requires the systematic governmental application of strategic communication targeting domestic audiences. The DHS Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism states that local communities are the most effective government partners in countering terrorist recruitment.[341] The American military power granted the military success over ISIS, but the further advance on countering terrorism additionally requires overpowering radical propaganda and making ISIS's power—its ideas—irrelevant.

B. SYNTHESIS OF PROPAGANDA COUNTERING TERRORISM IN THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

The traditions of propaganda[342] targeting domestic audiences in Azerbaijan have developed in the 20th century under two sets of conditions—periods of independence and Soviet

[338] *Combating Homegrown Terrorism: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on National Security of Committee on Oversight and Government Reform*, U.S. House of Representatives, 115th Cong.,1st sess. (July 27, 2017) (statement of Ron DeSantis, chairman of the Subcommittee).

[339] The war of ideas as a separate front of counterterrorism was put forth by, inter alia: Daniel Byman, *The Five Front War: The Better Way to Fight Global Jihad* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2008).

[340] Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, 22.

[341] U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism*, October 2016, https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/16_1028_S1_CVE_strategy.pdf.

[342] I have explained the choice of using the concept of propaganda related to strategic communication in Azerbaijan in Chapter III.

totalitarianism. During both periods of independence (i.e., 1918–1920 and 1991–present) Azerbaijan has faced similar threats to its territorial integrity, which has contributed to a similarity in the government's domestic propaganda narratives. Totalitarian domestic propaganda was introduced in the period when Azerbaijan was part of the Soviet Union (1920–1991). As opposed to the United States, where domestic strategic communication complemented wartime efforts, in Soviet Azerbaijan domestic propaganda was a wholly penetrative policy. The Soviet period's domestic propaganda of atheism sufficiently enforced Azerbaijani society's absorption of anti-religious narratives. Furthermore, the final development of the narrative of unity of Azerbaijanis who live in the Republic of Azerbaijan with those who live in Southern Azerbaijan[343] should also be attributed to the propaganda of the Soviet period. As a result of the Soviet era measures, Islam in Azerbaijan lost its emotional religious appeal.[344] By the time the Soviet Union collapsed, Soviet Azerbaijan's propaganda of scientific atheism and cultural nationalism significantly influenced people's beliefs.[345] Consequently, the next governments of the Republic of Azerbaijan did not face challenges in disseminating narratives of religious tolerance and political secularism among the population.

The Azerbaijani national government domestic propaganda uses narratives of dogmatic adherence to territorial integrity, which for the time being reduces the meaning of actual patriotism. Neighboring Armenia occupies[346] the Azerbaijani territories of Nagorno-Karabakh. In 2005, the

[343] According to the Gulustan (1813) and Turkmanchay (1828) agreements, which ended the Russo-Persian War, Russia took control over parts of Persia's Caucasian territories. The new border between Russia and Persia divided historical Azerbaijan into two parts by the river of Araz. The divided parts became unofficially known as Northern and Southern Azerbaijan. The actual Republic of Azerbaijan is based on the territories of Northern Azerbaijan. Southern Azerbaijan includes the four Iranian provinces of Eastern Azerbaijan, Western Azerbaijan, Ardebil, and Zanjan, and parts of the provinces of Gilan and Hamadan.

[344] Sattarov, *Islam, State, and Society in Independent Azerbaijan*, 70.

[345] Various stories of heroes permeated from the historical pasts of nations constituting the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and were compiled to highlight the essence of class struggle of Leninism.

[346] Nagorno-Karabakh has always been a part of Azerbaijan (see more at https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/print_aj.html). Following the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Nagorno-Karabakh was reaffirmed as territory of Azerbaijan by the United Nations, which adopted four Security Council resolutions demanding the withdrawal of occupying forces from the Azerbaijani region (see more at https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/eur/rls/or/13508.htm); furthermore, in a 2015 draft resolution, the Political Affairs Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) called for "the withdrawal of Armenian armed forces and other irregular armed forces from Nagorno-Karabakh and the other occupied territories of Azerbaijan, and the establishment of full sovereignty of Azerbaijan in these territories," in the framework of the OSCE Minsk process (see more at http://www.assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/News/News-View-EN.asp?newsid=5862&lang=2&cat=).

"Report of the OSCE Fact-Finding Mission to the Occupied Territories of Azerbaijan Surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh" found that the Armenian diaspora and authorities in Nagorno-Karabakh had organized resettlement of the population from Armenia on those territories.[347] Armenian authorities in Nagorno-Karabakh have destroyed or changed the historical facts on the ground speaking in favor of the Azerbaijani ownership of the Karabakh region's authentic Caucasian culture and ancient Christian religious heritage. Meanwhile, Caucasian culture and ancient Christian heritage feed narratives of Azerbaijani multiculturalism and religious tolerance, which in their turn constitute inseparable parts of the prevalent ideology of Azerbaijanism.[348] In accordance with Azerbaijanism, Azerbaijan is secular not only because of the influence of Turkism or its people's traditional European aspirations, but also because of the mixed origins of Azerbaijanis. Yet, the prolonged war with Armenia causes the aforementioned dogmatism and subjugates narratives of multiculturalism and religious tolerance toward all groups of people to the greater narrative of patriotism.

Against this background, there are two separate dimensions of the threat related to the religious radicalization in Azerbaijan, both driven by external forces. One of them is pro-Iranian Shi'a radicalism and extremism. Iran conducts propaganda targeting the Shi'a audience, constituting a majority among the Muslim population of Azerbaijan. As part of this propaganda, Azerbaijani clergymen in Iran have disseminated narratives against the separation of state and religion in the Republic of Azerbaijan, and for the unification of Azerbaijans within Iran.[349] The radical Shi'a propagandists mainly use the Internet and social media, as well as pro-Iranian clergy operating in mosques, to spread its ideas among various audiences, including but not limited to those who are unsatisfied with their social conditions. The narratives of global Shi'ism are rooted in the Shi'a Imam Hussain's self-sacrificing struggle for bringing justice to the poor and oppressed people. In Azerbaijan, radical Shi'a propaganda narratives declare that the creation of a socially just Shari'a state is a solution for the social grievances of people. The aim of this type of propaganda is the wider social and political mobilization of Shi'as in Azerbaijan. Some of the key

[347] "Report of the OSCE Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) to the Occupied Territories of Azerbaijan Surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh (NK)," European Parliament, April 16, 2018, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/fd/dsca20050413_08/dsca20050413_08en.pdf.

[348] Shaffer, *Borders and Brethren*, 157.

[349] Shaffer, *Borders and Brethren*, 187–188.

stories of the pro-Iranian conduits are opposition to the state's restriction of wearing the hijab in schools and condemnation of the demolition of several small mosques.[350] At the same time, pro-Iranian propagandists have disseminated extreme anti-Western narratives, reflecting the anti-America and anti-Israel stance of the Islamic Republic of Iran among limited groups of radicalized Azerbaijani Shi'as.

In Azerbaijan, the prevailing public mood does not favor much of the pro-Iranian propaganda because of the unattractiveness of the Iranian religious state model. The prevailing anti-Iranian attitudes of the majority of Azerbaijanis are based on the suppression of Azerbaijani national culture and language in Iran. Moreover, Shaffer stresses that the traditions of Azerbaijani secularism attract not only Azerbaijanis from Iran, but also other Iranians as well.[351] She argues that in the region radical Shi'a ideology could hardly win the intellectual battle against secularism. Eventually, in Azerbaijan, the power of radical Shi'a narratives is limited whenever their link to Iran becomes apparent.

Salafi propaganda is another external threat of religious radicalization in Azerbaijan. As in other countries Salafists in Azerbaijan identify themselves as Sunnis. However, a large number of Azerbaijanis do not classify newly evolved Salafists with traditional Sunnis.[352] Generally, Salafi tradition is closer to the Hanbali school of Sunni Islam. By contrast, Sunnis in Azerbaijan, as do those in Turkey, mainly follow the Hanafi and to some degree the Shafi'i schools of Sunni Islam, as do those in the Northern Caucasus. Unlike Azerbaijani Sunnis' ultimate tolerance of Shi'as in the country, Salafi ideology in its essence is hostile to Shi'a beliefs.[353] In addition, Salafists reject

[350] During the early years of independence, there were cases when mainly individuals built mosques on their private lands, intended for housing purposes. Owners assigned clergymen to lead religious ceremonies in such mosques. While some of those owners later passed the religious control over the mosques to the Administration of the Caucasus Muslims, some others did not. Eventually, the government decided to demolish a few of the mosques, justifying the decision, saying the mosques lacked the necessary construction permits. The government also allowed the demolition of a few of the official mosques during infrastructure construction projects. Each time government officials offered the people who used the demolished mosque an alternative newly built mosque.

[351] Shaffer, *Borders and Brethren*, 207.

[352] Non-recognition of Salafis as Sunnis is a notion that is inherent also to some Muslim clergy in the Northern Caucasus. In late August 2016, the authorities of the Chechen Republic of Russia organized in its capital city Grozny an international Islamic conference. During the conference the Islamic scholars from Russia, Egypt, Yemen, and Syria determined that Salafis and Wahhabis should not be considered Sunnis (see more at: Yaroslav Trofimov, "Split in Sunni Islam Threatens Saudi Influence," *Wall Street Journal*, September 23, 2016, ProQuest.)

[353] Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, 103.

pre-Islamic Azerbaijani cultural and national traditions. Beginning from the early 1990s, several benevolent foundations from the Gulf countries propagated Salafi Islam as a part of their aid programs targeting the young and Azerbaijani refugees from the occupied territories. The emphasis on humanitarian aid allowed Salafi propagandists to recruit supporters among both Shi'a and Sunni communities of Azerbaijan. Then, Azerbaijani converts openly propagated Salafism in small groups and mosques. The distinctive feature of the Salafi propaganda campaign targeting Azerbaijan's population has been its reluctance to criticize and confront the authorities over any significant issues.

Even though no official data about the numbers of Salafists in Azerbaijan is available,[354] their community has grown remarkably among the extremely pious population of the country. As a legacy of the Soviet era propaganda of atheism, Azerbaijanis have not deeply educated about the pillars of Shi'a or Sunni ideologies. Most Azerbaijanis consider themselves Shi'a or Sunni because of the influence of their parents and grandparents. Arguably, the numbers showing a Shi'a majority of 65 percent do not necessarily mean that all those Shi'as are full-time practicing Muslims. The same can be said of traditional Sunnis. However, being Salafi in Azerbaijan presumes practicing that branch of Islam fully. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the population of Azerbaijan showed interest in the revival of their Islamic values. Mostly religiously uneducated local Shi'a and Sunni clergymen were not able to provide essentially educated Azerbaijanis with solid religious knowledge. Salafi converts caught the moment, introduced the "bookish" Islam, and often succeeded in out-arguing the traditional clergymen in religious debates.[355] Meanwhile, charitable organizations from the Gulf countries helped Azerbaijanis to study in Islamic universities following Salafi traditions. The most widespread explanation for Azerbaijanis' conversion to Salafism speak in favor of Salafi propagandists' financial capabilities and theoretical preparedness.[356] Eventually, Salafi propagandists managed to persuade people ceremonially affiliated with Shi'ism or Sunnism, other religions, or with an atheist background to full-heartedly practice Islam as Salafists.

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[354] Governments of Azerbaijan have never conducted a census based on religious affiliation. Usually informal religious leaders or experts have brought different uncited numbers of Salafis in Azerbaijan, varying from 10,000 to 80,000, what roughly constitutes from 0.1 percent to 0.8 percent of the Muslims in the country.

[355] Gasimov, "Multimodal Salafi Engagement with Digital Media in Azerbaijan."

[356] International Crises Group, *Azerbaijan: Independent Islam and The State.*

Yet, from the late 1990s, the propaganda of jihadism has developed in Azerbaijan as well. The evolution of some Salafists to jihadists in Azerbaijan happened under the external influence of al-Qaeda activities in the Northern Caucasus. Initially, Salafi-jihadists from the regions of Azerbaijan bordering the Northern Caucasus took part in the war of Chechens against Russia, and then more Azerbaijanis joined the war in Afghanistan and eventually appeared in Iraq and Syria. Jihad propagandists have recruited supporters among Azerbaijani Salafists who faced social problems or were alienated by the government's harsh stance on Salafism in general. Along with the narratives of global jihadism, such as praising life in the Islamic State and accusing Shi'as of apostasy, jihadist propaganda in Azerbaijan opposes the government because of its cooperation with Western countries, the popularization of European culture, and the alleged suppression of Islam. At the same time, jihadists threaten Shi'a clergymen by committing terrorist acts against them.

Even though the propaganda of purist Salafists and jihadists use the same Salafi ideology, their propagandists cannot use the same conduits. Azerbaijani purist Salafists own Internet sites and news agencies, systematically gather in particular mosques, and openly disseminate their narratives in social media. Purist Salafists do their utmost not to be linked to jihadism. Moreover, the purists have used their media and Internet sites to debate with jihadists and disseminate narratives rejecting the terrorists' anti-government appeals targeting Azerbaijanis.[357] Being formally rejected by the purist Salafists, jihadi propagandists mainly rely on social networks. The Azerbaijani Constitution and Criminal Code, however, outlaw any types of propaganda of violence and terrorism. Thus jihadists either do not reveal their personality or operate from the places beyond the control of Azerbaijani law enforcement. The fact that the government of Azerbaijan has been intolerant of religious radicalism limits Salafists overall in their use of media based in the country.

On the other hand, the government of Azerbaijan has administrative experience in countering homegrown violent extremism and fighting terrorism, but propaganda targeting domestic audiences as a part of counterterrorism is a rather new realm for the country. Starting from the mid-1990s, several administrations have conducted a series of law enforcement

[357] Gasimov, "Multimodal Salafi Engagement with Digital Media in Azerbaijan."

operations and promoted legislative measures to disrupt pro-Iranian Shi'a extremism. The law enforcement agencies have investigated several cases of Hezbollah-directed terrorist acts and plots. Media campaigns that followed the law enforcement operations revealed the external influence of extremists and linked their activities to the establishment of an Iranian-like regime in Azerbaijan. Recently, after the law enforcement operations against Shi'a extremists in a traditionally religious village of Nardaran near Baku, the government has improved educational and infrastructure conditions in the village in order to mitigate foundations for radicalization.

The state's response to Salafi radicalization has been even tougher than on Shi'a extremism mainly because the radical form of Salafism—Wahhabism—demonstrated an imminent terrorist threat in the example of the Northern Caucasus and later with regard to the 9/11 attacks. Starting from the late 1990s, government and security officials in their public interviews did not distinguish between purist and violent Salafists, pointing to the terrorist threat that the supporters of Wahhabism posed to Azerbaijan. The media did not make the distinction either. Eventually, the counter-Wahhabism campaign covered all the supporters of Salafi branch in Azerbaijan. The nearly singular narrative was that Wahhabism (Salafism, jihadism) was equal to terrorism. In order to counter Wahhabism ideologically, Azerbaijan has worked out narratives anchoring multiculturalism and targeting domestic audiences. Lately, the government's programs on education, work with youth and religious organizations, together with law enforcement, have increased their focus on propaganda against violent extremism. In order to advance in the war of ideas, the Azerbaijani government may need to apply the best international experience of organizing credible and persuasive propaganda targeting domestic audiences.

C. POLICY PARALLELS

I draw policy parallels between domestic strategic communication in the United States and propaganda in Azerbaijan relative to the periods when the countries faced similar historical conditions, that is, during crises and wars. Firstly, the mobilization of domestic audiences to emotionally support government narratives is common to both countries during crises. Secondly, a centralized government institution conducting domestic strategic communication exists in both countries. Finally, the counterterrorism responses of both countries use similar narratives of religious tolerance and rejection of violent extremism.

During the crises of the 20th century, the governments of the United States and Azerbaijan favored the emotionally appealing patriotic narratives in domestic propaganda. The CPI created a war psychology in the United States during World War I.[358] During World War II the American administration used the narrative of a war of ideology and a story that "Germany was an existential threat to Europe and thus to the United States as well" in order to focus Americans' attention on foreign policy issues.[359] An all-Soviet total war psychology and a narrative of a war against the ideology of fascism covered Azerbaijan's population during World War II. At times, Azerbaijan's propaganda of patriotism has shifted to total war psychology, as it did during the hot phases of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. Atrocity stories as a means of discrediting the enemy were a feature of American propaganda during World War I.[360] This approach was honed during World War II when American propaganda portrayed Hitler as a composite character of the Nazi threat.[361] In a like manner, during the latest clashes on the Karabakh front in 2016, an emotional appeal for retribution became apparent in Azerbaijan again.[362] Azerbaijan's propaganda has often portrayed Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian as a symbol of the Armenian cruelty toward Azerbaijanis.[363] Both the United States and Azerbaijan have used propaganda narratives targeting domestic audiences and emphasizing their adversary's cruelty in order to mobilize public support for wars.

The centralization of strategic communication intended for the domestic audience in the United States during the World Wars and its generally centralized character in Azerbaijan is another parallel. Historically, the United States had specific federal entities like the CPI and OWI that were responsible for strategic communication (though during limited time periods). Likewise,

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[358] Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 244.

[359] Thomas Johnson, "Thinking Narratively" (lecture, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, April 10, 2018).

[360] Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 244.

[361] Johnson, "Thinking Narratively."

[362] Thomas de Waal, "Nagorno-Karabakh's Cocktail of Conflict Explodes Again," *BBC*, April 3, 2016, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35954969.

[363] Serzh Sarkisian was one of the leaders of the Karabakh separatist movement of the late 1980s. In one of his interviews he recognized that Armenian forces deliberately killed Azerbaijani civilians in the city of Khojali in Nagorno-Karabakh (see more at: Thomas De Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 172.) Since the book has been published this story has been widely used by Azerbaijan's propaganda targeting domestic and foreign audiences.

during the Soviet period, there was a specific propaganda department in the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Azerbaijan. After World War II, the White House communications staff had demonstrated an interest in framing the news agenda in the United States. Similarly, during the independence period in Azerbaijan, the presidential administration generally has tried to set a news agenda in relation to the critical events, even though there is no particular department of propaganda.

The use of domestic strategic communication as a counterterrorist response is the most recent example of a parallel policy in the United States and Azerbaijan. In both countries the strategy aims to counter the same enemy—Islamic radicalization leading to terrorism. The United States applies CVE activities in order to disrupt terrorist recruitment. At the same time, the United States' message advocates for religious tolerance. Lately, Azerbaijan has recognized the significance of countering radicalization among youth and vulnerable groups of the population. Similarly, Azerbaijani narratives of multiculturalism are based on the idea of religious tolerance. The U.S. government bodies also fund projects that promote the elaboration of these narratives and active community engagement in order to counter radical propaganda online. By the same token, the government of Azerbaijan has started programs in the field of education, youth affairs, and religion aiming at increasing the engagement of particular groups in activities of disseminating narratives of multiculturalism.

D. POLICY DIVISIONS

This thesis has identified that during the 20th century differences in, on the one side, application of strategic communication within the United States and, on another side, propaganda in Azerbaijan, have emanated from their temporary exigency and, respectively, constant character. The various U.S. administrations applied strategic communication only during crises, by disseminating the narrative of the American exceptionalism and therefore appealing to the responsibility of Americans to spread democracy to the world. In contrast, during the 20th century, various Azerbaijani administrations applied propaganda constantly, either justifying its importance by a perceived existential threat to the statehood or having propaganda as a constituent part of the Soviet totalitarian policy. Consequently, the aforementioned differences influenced how the governments in the United States and Azerbaijan engaged the media in their strategic

communication. The new threat of Islamic extremism that both countries face not only highlights their common policy approaches (which this chapter has previously discussed) but also reveals the specificities of the application of strategic communication in counterterrorism. These differences emanate from the different religious contexts that impact the scale of the target audiences and the governments' stances toward Islam.

Even though propaganda has been used as a crisis measure by both governments, the different perceptions of crises in the United States and Azerbaijan have influenced the duration of each government's propaganda campaign. In the United States, the World Wars temporarily allowed administrations to use propaganda targeting domestic audiences. American public opinion, though, often criticized the use of propaganda even during crisis periods. After the crises ended, propaganda organs, such as the CPI and the OWI, were immediately dismantled. Moreover, in 1948, the Smith–Mundt Act limited the U.S. government's informational activities by targeting only foreign audiences. In contrast, Azerbaijan's legislature has not limited its government's dissemination of propaganda— in Azerbaijan has had a continuous character. The Azerbaijan People's Republic of 1918–1920 existed under the permanent threat of occupation, and the Republic of Azerbaijan after 1991 has an unresolved territorial dispute with Armenia. Moreover, in Soviet Azerbaijan, domestic propaganda was a significant tool for the totalitarian regime. Eventually, the Azerbaijani public did not question the government's right to conduct propaganda campaigns targeting the domestic audience. Unlike in the United States, propaganda targeting domestic audiences is not a provisional crisis measure in Azerbaijan; it is the government's permanent instrument to deal with the continuous perceived existential crisis. In addition, the different context of the application of strategic communication, or "prevailing public mood,"[364] in the United States and Azerbaijan has impacted the two countries' governments approach to crafting narratives. The particularity of the continuous perceived existential threat to the nation-state in Azerbaijan has allowed its government to spread a less complicated narrative of patriotism. One does not need to elaborate a sophisticated narrative about the significance of the threat when the threat is believed to be obvious. On the contrary, Americans were not confident about the need for American participation either in World War I or World War II (at least before the Pearl Harbor

[364] Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 316.

attack). The American administrations of the time had to consider people's lack of interest in joining a war in Europe. To get people's support to conduct wars overseas, American administrations had to make them believe that Americans had a responsibility to spread democracy and bring peace to the nations of the world. At last, during the 20th century, American administrations in their strategic communication targeting domestic audiences had to be more creative and persuasive in narratives than Azerbaijani governments were in theirs.

As a result, the ways in which the governments of the United States and of Azerbaijan engage the media in their strategic communication varies as well. The financial independence and overall large role of the media in the United States makes possible for the U.S. government to engage news outlets only by mutually beneficial agreement. Thus, professional journalists headed both the CPI and OWI. Taking the major media's interests into consideration, some administrations integrated its representatives into political teams. This impacted the way in which the White House managed to get the media on its side when it was necessary. During times of war or military campaigns abroad, American administrations were able to apply military censorship or partly limit the media's capabilities to gather information from the battlefields. Unlike in the United States, during the Soviet period, Azerbaijani administrations fully controlled the media. The media in Soviet Azerbaijan obediently disseminated the Communist Party's propaganda narratives. Moreover, the Communist Party's programs for youth, women, and its branches in various workplaces controlled further spread of those narratives, such as by organizing discussions about particular articles in the press, radio speeches, or TV appearances. The Soviet totalitarian control over media was dismantled immediately after Azerbaijan became independent. During 2001–2005, Azerbaijan adopted legislation about the state's support to the media. Recently, the government has provided journalists in need with free apartments and has declared it is going to continue its social programs for the media representatives.[365] The government has made it clear that it wants the media to be patriotic, which includes its adherence to traditional national values. Meanwhile, critics have argued that the government's social programs aim at mitigating the media criticism of the authorities. One of the pioneers of the press in Azerbaijan recently pointed out that the lack of commercials and advertising revenue is the most critical problem facing the press in

[365] Damien McGuinness, "Azerbaijan Offers Journalists Free Apartments," BBC, July 22, 2017, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-14249745.

Azerbaijan.[366] The limited financial capabilities of the media in Azerbaijan make it more dependent on the state's financial support and influences how easily the government may engage the media in domestic propaganda campaigns. Yet this difference is not fixed; with the advance of democracy and consequent strengthening of the media in Azerbaijan, the government may want to apply the tools of media engagement used by previous U.S. administrations.

One important difference in the application of strategic communication is related to the narratives countering Islamic terrorist propaganda in the United States and Azerbaijan. Unlike in Azerbaijan, in the United States Muslims represent a minority of the population. Due to a lack of credibility, the U.S. government finds it cannot engage in *theological* battles with radical Islam.[367] In the United States, the government institutions do not elaborate details of Islamic narratives countering radicalization. The American strategy of CVE[368] is a larger narrative by itself. By using CVE as a larger narrative, the government, through agencies such as DHS, "equips community partners" with the information, grants, and other tools to help them identify and counter radicalization to violence.[369] This mutual trust between government and its community partners becomes essential. Accordingly, the strategy principally declares that intelligence and law enforcement investigations are not parts of the CVE activities. Although American policy makers, legislators, law enforcement, and academics recognize Salafism as the radical ideology that al-Qaeda and ISIS use to recruit supporters worldwide, American narratives of CVE do not target it specifically. Narratives of CVE are complementary to U.S. law-enforcement measures and aim to deter legitimate American radicals from progressing to criminal activities of violence. In contrast, the Constitution of Azerbaijan prohibits the propaganda of religions "humiliating people's dignity

[366] "Elchin Shikhli on Fate of Print Media in Azerbaijan," *Turan Information Agency*, March 14, 2018, http://turan.az/ext/news/2018/3/free/Interview/en/69871.htm.

[367] *Jihad 2.0: Social Media in The Next Evolution of Terrorist Recruitment: Hearing Before Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs,* U.S. Senate, 114th Cong., 1st sess. (May 7, 2015) (testimony of Peter Bergen, Director, International Security Program, New America).

[368] Countering violent extremism refers to proactive actions to counter efforts by extremists to radicalize, recruit, and mobilize followers to violence (see more at: https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/16_1028_S1_CVE_strategy.pdf).

[369] U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism*, October 2016, https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/16_1028_S1_CVE_strategy.pdf.

and contradicting the principles of humanism."[370] Nonetheless, administrations in Azerbaijan do not oppose radical Salafi ideology either. But given the growing threat of religious radicalization as a part of Azerbaijan's narratives of multiculturalism, the government has defined what traditional Islam means and further supported it. Azerbaijan's government pretends that the traditions of peaceful coexistence of the Shi'a and Sunni branches of Islam in Azerbaijan[371] are the key obstacle to Islamic radicalization in the country. The various governments of Azerbaijan have also accentuated the domination of traditions of Shi'a and Sunni branches of Islam[372] as parts of the narratives countering religious radicalization.

The aforementioned difference in the respective narratives of the United States and Azerbaijan is important also because it conditions how the government's narratives are disseminated among different audiences. One of the latest reviewed American policy documents—the congressional hearing of July 2017 related to homegrown extremism—demonstrates that American policy makers recognize Muslim communities as the key target audience for the government's CVE activities.[373] In contrast, Azerbaijan's multiculturalism propaganda presumably targets various domestic audiences. Yet, as discussed earlier, narratives anchoring Shi'a or Sunni Islam probably would be better heard either by adherents of those branches of Islam, or at least by the audiences not severely radicalized by Salafism. In any case, Azerbaijan's domestic propaganda countering radicalization has a general educative character and targets the population of the country as a whole. This difference between narratives requires from the two countries application of various approaches in their dissemination.

[370] "The Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan," Portal Azerbaijan.az, accessed March 28, 2018, http://azerbaijan.az/portal/General/Constitution/doc/constitution_e.pdf.

[371] Shaffer, *Borders and Brethren*, 164.

[372] Due to the secular character of Azerbaijan's statehood, governments have not conducted census corresponding specifically to people's religious affiliation. According to the data collected by the staff of the Presidential Library the most recent ratio between Shi'as and Sunnis is 60–65 percent to 35–40 percent (see more at: http://multiculturalism.preslib.az/en_a4.html).

[373] Ron DeSantis, chairman of the Subcommittee, statement on *Combating Homegrown Terrorism*.

E. POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR STRENGTHENING STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION IN COUNTERING TERRORISM

The threat of terrorism is prevalent in both Azerbaijan and the United States, and therefore, despite having different cultural and political contexts, strengthening strategic communication is prudent. However, the different resources allocated, different political agendas, as well as different legislative and institutional frameworks affect the ways in which both countries might strengthen their respective strategic communication.

Unlike discussions related to strengthening strategic communication that targets an international audience, the debate about the domestic realm has not developed as much because of the democratic restraints on such an activity. In this section, I discuss the strengthening of domestic strategic communication against Islamic radicalization and terrorist recruitment by way of improving the institutional framework and narratives of that policy. Even though the United States and Azerbaijan vary in their national particulars of strategic communication, there are general opportunities that can be used by both to strengthen their policies.

Strategic communication requires clear direction, coordination, and responsibility.[374] In both countries, one of the significant gaps in domestic strategic communication countering Islamic radicalization is the lack of a single governmental institution responsible for its coordination. In the United States, three key institutions, the State Department's Global Engagement Center, the FBI's Office of Partner Engagement, and DHS's Office for Community Partnerships carry on strategic communication in order to counter terrorist recruitment narratives targeting domestic audiences. In Azerbaijan, the activities related to countering terrorism are the prerogative of the State Security Service, which by publishing reports on terrorist plots and successful investigations spreads the instant counterterrorism warning to a general audience. Meanwhile, the government's propaganda countering radicalization is decentralized. The Azerbaijan government develops its propaganda by educating the overlapping groups of population, such as youth, sportsmen, women, students, and religious and ethnic communities. Consequently, there is variety of governmental institutions propagating the government's narrative countering religious radicalization: The Ministry of Youth and Sport, Azerbaijan Youth Foundation, the State Committee for Family,

[374] Christopher Paul, *Whither Strategic Communication: A Survey of Current Proposals and Recommendations* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2009), 5, https://www.rand.org/pubs/occasional_papers/OP250.html.

Women and Children Affairs, the Ministry of Education, the State Committee on Work with Religious Associations, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, as well as the government-funded NGO the Administration of the Caucasus Muslims.[375] The lack of a coordinative institution hinders the promotion of consistency and dynamism in countering the quickly evolving threat of radical Islam.

To form a bond, the government has to modify its narratives to the targeted audiences. In both the United States and Azerbaijan, there is a need for a comprehensive approach to the preparation of narratives countering Islamic radicalization. By definition, federal governments have wider organizational and financial capacities in conducting research, defining the context, and eventually making effective narratives. One example is the battle between the "just and unjust,"[376] which is a very widespread narrative for Islamic radicals who claim that they represent justice, while their antagonists represent injustice. Meanwhile, the provision of justice is a public good—the realm where governments usually have a lot to communicate. Thus, not only enhancing it but also communicating to people the narrative of a state's provision of justice is natural for a government's domestic strategic communication. Furthermore, another point is to disseminate narratives targeting families and close friends of potential terrorist recruits in order to make them believe that telling authorities about the radicalization of their loved ones is better than keeping it secret.[377] Tailoring narratives and stories in accordance with target audiences might also improve the effectiveness of strategic communication. Deradicalizing narratives will be of no interest for those who are far from becoming a violent extremist; moreover, they even may cause annoyance.[378] While narratives represent significant tools in a war of ideas, strategic communication countering terrorist recruitment requires assiduous work to enhance those narratives.

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[375] In addition to that the government has particular structures addressing issues related to national minorities, such as is a Department of Broadcasting of Ethnic Minority Programs in Public Television of Azerbaijan. Their activities include propagating among them the narratives of multiculturalism.

[376] Johnson, *Taliban Narratives*, 275.

[377] Bergen, testimony on *Jihad 2.0*.

[378] For instance, in 2013, the State Department's demystifying ISIS campaign "Think Again, Turn Away" caused heated public debates triggering sarcasm and skepticism among the non-audience (i.e., people hardly interested in joining ISIS).

The more ambiguous task for government strategic communication in this regard may be not only preventing radicalization of citizens but also disrupting terrorists' beliefs in order to encourage individual disengagement. First of all, narratives of strategic communication countering terrorist propaganda might consider addressing ultimate human aspirations, such as justice and equality. Governments are capable of presenting stories related to the ends of justice. These narratives and stories may correspond with the motivations of some terrorists and make them reconsider their choice of participation in terrorist activities. Paul Kamolnick argues that "behavioral disengagement from terrorism" [379] rather than merely countering radicalization is a more important goal for the United States' strategic communication. He fairly points out that delegitimizing the radical Islamist appeal is possible based on ISIS's deviation from Islam's definitions of sinners and disbelievers. In this regard, Azerbaijan has noteworthy grounds. Traditions of the peaceful coexistence of Shi'a and Sunni adepts of Islam in Azerbaijan fit the idea of "resolution of the intra-Islamic sectarian divide" as the way of defeating ISIS's ideology.[380] The wider cooperation between governments and scholars of the two countries may help each country find the missing elements for strengthening its strategic communication aimed at deradicalization.

With regard to countering terrorist propaganda, a joint approach of monopolizing the media space and acquiring the public trust may strengthen government strategic communication. During a war of ideas, the suppression of some information and the exaggeration of other information, as well as various framings are conventional techniques. Governments need to coordinate not only truthful messages but deceptive ones as well, though with a greater level of caution.[381] At the same time, media's self-regulation can help to weaken publicity for terrorists. Moreover, media's self-regulation is welcomed in the field of suppression (or framing) of the true information that terrorist propaganda can use to elaborate narratives of hatred or relevant stories; after all, certain true stories can still motivate the unwelcomed behavior.[382] Building on Western media's reports that can

[379] Paul Kamolnick, *The Al-Qaeda Organization and The Islamic State Organization History: Doctrine, Modus Operandi, and U.S. Policy to Degrade and Defeat Terrorism Conducted in the Name of Sunni Islam*, D 101.146:AL 7/4 (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, 2017), 180, https://purl.fdlp.gov/GPO/gpo81181.

[380] Kamolnick, *The Al-Qaeda Organization and The Islamic State Organization History,* 189.

[381] Paul, *Strategic Communication,* 29.

[382] Johnson, *Taliban Narratives,* 2.

provoke the feelings of Muslims, terrorists may claim that their propaganda is indeed educational.[383] A consensus between the government and the media is needed with regard to reducing the publicity for terrorists and suppressing (or framing) the information terrorists can use in their propaganda. Such consensus over better control of the informational realm is hardly possible if the media and public distrust the government's strategic communication. Expanding the participation of a civil society, local communities, and volunteers in disseminating counter radicalization narratives may result in an increase of public trust and contribute to the overall success.

F. CONCLUSION

This chapter compared and contrasted the historical development of strategic communication in the United States and Azerbaijan, and the application of this policy in counterterrorism. Prioritization of freedom of expression was the cornerstone in the organization of the domestic-oriented strategic communication in the United States during the 20th century. During peacetime, American policy makers, legislators, and presidents have avoided the use of strategic communication domestically. Meanwhile, the Azerbaijani analog to strategic communication is known as propaganda, and during the 20th century, propaganda targeting domestic audiences developed under changing political systems. These political systems correspond with two separate periods: that of national independence and the period of Soviet totalitarianism. Those controversial periods have left their legacies, affecting the institutional framework and narratives of domestic propaganda in Azerbaijan. In both the United States and Azerbaijan during various historical periods an existential threat contributed to the success of each government's domestic propaganda campaigns. Finally, the analysis of policy parallels and divisions between the two countries highlighted potential opportunities for the United States and Azerbaijan to strengthen their strategic communication in countering terrorism, respectively.

[383] Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 20.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

A. CONCLUSIONS

The United States and the Republic of Azerbaijan differ in their application of strategic communication to counter terrorist recruitment propaganda. Most notably, they differ in their stance, or lack thereof, on Islamic concepts and in the audiences targeted by each government's strategic communication. These differences emanate not only from the obvious dissimilarity between the countries but also from the various institutional legacies that the concept of domestic strategic communication carries. Furthermore, the lessons from how the United States deals institutionally with strategic communication to counter terrorist propaganda may help Azerbaijan to strengthen the civil society component of the domestic application of government propaganda.[384]

Generally, this thesis argues for the importance of domestic strategic communication in countering terrorist propaganda and recruitment. It recognizes the government's role in the construction of official narratives and in the tailoring of those narratives to specific audiences. The definition of narratives is context-dependent, and their meanings are multifold. As mentioned in Chapter I, the narrative is most commonly recognized as "an important arsenal of cultural ammunition that helps to cultivate doctrine supporting morale and spirit."[385] The second chapter of this thesis followed the historical development of the concept and organization of domestic strategic communication in the United States from World War I to the War on Terror. The present legislative and institutional frameworks of domestic strategic communication in the United States incorporate its democratic checks and balances.

In Chapter III, the research examines the historical development of domestic propaganda in Azerbaijan during three periods of its nation-state in the 20th century, each having its particular

[384] Unlike in the United States, the term "strategic communication" has no real meaning in Azerbaijan. In the context of Azerbaijan, the term *təbliğat* is used in order to explain the spread of ideas among people. It carries a neutral connotation and is most literally translated into English as propaganda or popularization. Government institutions of Azerbaijan use *təbliğat* to describe their promotion of Azerbaijani culture, tourism in Azerbaijan, or the propaganda of patriotism among youth. At the same time relative to the propaganda concerning the radical religions the term *təbliğat* is used as well. However, the term propaganda, as a neologism, is sometimes used in the Azerbaijani language, and in those very rare cases, it carries the extremely negative meaning.

[385] Johnson, *Taliban Narratives,* 2–3.

legacy. First, the research discusses the ideology and religious propaganda of the First Azerbaijan Republic (1918–1920), because its legacy was in the establishment of the narratives of secularism and nationalism that underpin contemporary Azerbaijani propaganda. Second, it proceeds to the anti-Islam propaganda prevalent during the Soviet era (with a short break during World War II), because that period's legacy had largely enforced the narrative of secularism embedded in contemporary Azerbaijani propaganda and affected the institutional framework of strategic communication. Third, the research addresses the patriotism propaganda of the independent Republic of Azerbaijan after 1991, whose legacy will be the mobilization of popular support for the government under the perceived existential threat[386] to Azerbaijani nation-statehood, triggered by Armenian aggression. By doing this, the thesis follows the emergence of the ideology of Azerbaijanism and the narratives of patriotism, multiculturalism, and religious tolerance in the Republic of Azerbaijan. Then it looks at how successive governments' domestic propaganda has dealt with alien radical religious ideas that target audiences in Azerbaijan. This thesis advances the argument by revealing that the context in Azerbaijan has actually favored its government propaganda countering religious radicalization.

In Chapter IV, by comparing and contrasting the historical development of strategic communications in the United States and Azerbaijan and applying this policy in counterterrorism, the thesis highlights the weak and strong points in each of the cases. The policy of domestic strategic communications in the United States developed during the World Wars of the 20th century, and that country has effectively prioritized freedom of expression in its organization. In the 21st century, the rise of jihadist propaganda promoting violent extremism has enabled the application of strategic communication domestically under several American administrations, under a variety of definitions, such as "global engagement," "community partnership," and "countering violent extremism efforts." At the same time, in its narratives the United States has avoided weighing in on the theological roots of Islamic radicalism. In 2011, its main efforts at

[386] The set of perceived existential threats includes Russian-backed Armenian aggression, and Russia, Iran, and Armenia warmed up ethnic separatism among minority nationalities residing in Azerbaijan. The three countries have organized cooperative activities targeting the Lezgins, Avars, and Talishs of Azerbaijan. From time to time, these countries have organized pseudo-scientific conferences, where a few of representatives of Azerbaijani national minorities have raised their own cases of irredentism. Even though, ethnic separatism is not popular among the Lezgins, Avars, and Talishs residing in Azerbaijan, according to general perceptions, in case of the separation of the Armenian populated territories, irredentism may be triggered by the aforementioned three countries in other regions of Azerbaijan as well. This eventually would challenge the existence of Azerbaijani nation statehood per se.

countering radical Islam and al-Qaeda propaganda on the Internet targeted potential recruits and tried to turn them away from joining al-Qaeda. Pursuant the same goal, the National Counterterrorism Center disseminated information that was supposed to warn Americans about the realities of the terrorists' recruitment. These educative materials generally have conveyed the message that joining terrorists is bad and that American Muslims enjoy their lives in the United States. Arguably, these messages resonate with individuals who have not yet been radicalized. The messages do not question the rationale of radicalized audiences.

At the same time, in Azerbaijan during the 20th century, its traditions of propaganda targeting domestic audiences developed under two conditions—independence and Soviet totalitarianism. As an independent country, Azerbaijan has faced two separate dimensions of religious radicalization, both driven by pro-Iranian Shi'ism and global Salafism. Since the Islamic revolution in Iran, successive governments of Azerbaijan have sufficiently contained Iranian religious propaganda by supporting their own nationalistic narrative of a unified Azerbaijan, a narrative that may resonate with more than 35 million Azerbaijanis in Iran.[387] Yet the situation is different with regard to the propaganda of Salafism, which presents the potential threat of religious extremism and terrorist recruitment. Lately, authorities have paid more attention to countering religious radicalization and have recognized the significance of Azerbaijani multiculturalism as a set of narratives that may effectively resonate with different groups of people in the country. The analysis sheds light upon the fact that even though Azerbaijan has solid foundations for narratives countering various vectors of religious radicalization, it needs to strengthen its institutional framework in the field of strategic communication targeting domestic audiences to counter radical propaganda.

There are several analyses to be made here. As a result of military operations on the ground, al-Qaeda and ISIS have been losing control over their territories and suffering human losses. ISIS has expanded its propaganda efforts targeting audiences in countries far from the battleground and

[387] There are no exact statistics about how many Azerbaijanis live in Iran. Yet in 2006 Iran's Ambassador to Azerbaijan, Afshar Soleymani, said that their approximate number was about 35 million. The acting supreme religious leader of Iran Seyyed Ali Khamenei, as well as large part of Iran's religious and military elite, are Azerbaijanis (see more at: Arif Yunusov, *Azerbaijan v Nachale 21 Veka: Konflikti I Potensialnie Ugrozi* [*Azerbaijan in the Early 21st Century: Conflicts and Potential Threats*] (Baku: Adiloglu, 2007), 62, http://elibrary.bsu.az/books_460/N_418.pdf).

taken its terrorist war on infidels to the informational realm. Thus, to secure their nation-states, governments need to counter terrorist propaganda, which disseminates radical narratives and eventually leads to homegrown extremism. Strategic communication targeting domestic audiences might be a proper governmental response to the terrorist threat. Despite the differences in the cultural conditions of the United States and Azerbaijan, similarities in the historical application of strategic communication, shared values of democracy, and the common threat of Islamic extremism imply that there might be common ways the governments of both countries can enhance their respective domestic strategic communication to counter terrorist recruitment.

Arguably, the United States and Azerbaijan, both formally being secular countries, differ in their understanding or lack thereof of Islamic concepts. In the United States, the First Amendment protects freedom of religion, including the promotion of radical ideas unless they advocate for violence. American secularism is focused on the individual's religious freedom.[388] Furthermore, the United States empowers its moderate local communities, which in turn promote the government's narratives of countering violent extremism. CVE establishes the notion of "moderate Islam" that the United States does not define for itself. The straightforward understanding of moderate Islam is that it does not appeal to violence (or jihad). It is worth mentioning that as the author of an idea of jihad against the United States, Osama bin Laden almost defined what moderate Islam is not when he responded to some Saudi scholars who promoted the coexistence of the United States and Muslims.[389] Using the method of exclusion, moderate Islam can be defined as tolerating polytheism and not making judgments about who is Muslim and who is not. Very generally, religiously tolerant Muslims may be considered moderate Muslims.

In contrast, Azerbaijan's secularism is more complex. On the legislative level Article 18 of the constitution of Azerbaijan separates religion from the state and education system.[390] The law "On the Freedom of Religion" requires religious communities register with the government, strictly regulates the distribution of religious material, and bans religious propaganda of non-

[388] Peter Mandaville, *Islam and Politics*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), 11.

[389] Osama bin Laden considered following the most worrying narratives of jihadism for the West: disavowal of polytheism and its supporters, religious struggle-*jihad*, and excommunication-*takfir* (see more at: Shiraz Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism: The History of an Idea* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016], 15).

[390] Portal Azerbaijan.az, "The Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan."

citizens.[391] The State Committee on Work with Religious Associations represents the state with regard to religion. It is responsible for the safeguarding of religious freedoms and the registration of religious communities with the government. At the same time, Article 8 of the law "On the Freedom of Religion" defines a special role of the non-state organization Administration of the Caucasus Muslims in the coordination of all Muslim religious communities in Azerbaijan. Article 9 of the law particularly mentions the historical significance of the Administration of the Caucasus Muslims as a center of Islam in Azerbaijan. The Administration of the Caucasus Muslims controls the mosques, supervises pilgrimages to Mecca, as well as the Shi'a holy sites of Kerbela and Mashhad, and provides Islamic education. It finances itself on the basis of voluntary almsgivings collected in the mosques. The aforementioned constitutes the legal framework of the state's relation to religion in Azerbaijan.

At the same time, informally, Azerbaijan's position relative to Islam anchors its history beginning from the first Azerbaijani state of the 16th century.[392] It recognizes the historical role of the Shi'a and Sunni branches of Islam. Nevertheless, the government's narratives of multiculturalism include supporting Judaism and the traditional branches of Christianity.[393] Furthermore, religious tolerance presumes tolerance toward other branches of Christianity, Bahaism, and Krishnaism. Meanwhile, the Administration of the Caucasus Muslims defines traditional Islam for Azerbaijan by excluding what is not traditional for Azerbaijan's Muslim population; eventually, Islamic concepts not fitting this logic are not welcomed by the Islamic ideology of this country. This difference is a part of the greater dissimilarity between the countries;

[391] "Dini etigad azadlighi hagginda Azerbaijan Respublikasinin ganunu" [The law On the Freedom of Religion of the Republic of Azerbaijan], E-Qanun, accessed April 26, 2018, http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/7649.

[392] From the 15th century the territory of Azerbaijan had been the arena of conflicts between the Shi'a Safavi and the Sunni Ottoman rulers. Yet, the first historical Azerbaijani state in the 16th century was largely formed as a result of successful mobilization of Turkic tribes under Shi'a concepts of Islam. Its founder, a Sufi convert to Shi'ism, Ismail Safavi, proclaimed Shi'ism the official religion of Azerbaijan in 1501. At the same time, some Azerbaijanis followed Sunni Islam. Due to the secular character of Azerbaijan's statehood, governments have not conducted a census specifically corresponding to people's religious affiliation. According to the data collected by the staff of the Presidential Library the most recent ratio between Shi'as and Sunnis is 60–65 percent to 35–40 percent (see more at: http://multiculturalism.preslib.az/en_a4.html).

[393] This thesis was limited to issues related to Islam. Thus, it did not define which branches of Christianity Azerbaijan's government recognizes as traditional for the country. Yet they do and support Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Protestantism. The mentioned communities operate churches, religious schools, and courses with the government's financial support. At the same time, Azerbaijan demonstrates neutrality regarding the existence of the Baptists, Adventists, Pentecostals, and Jehovah's Witnesses (see more at http://multiculturalism.preslib.az/en_a4.html).

whereas the United States prioritizes the protection of freedom of expression, Azerbaijan has a complex system of protection of its people's beliefs from the influence of radical ideas. Thus, the United States and Azerbaijan promote secularism differently.

Furthermore, the strategic communication of both countries differs by the population groups they target. The traditional Islamic values of Azerbaijan accredited as part of its broader concept of multiculturalism have been integrated into Azerbaijani ideology. Various government institutions have also promoted multiculturalism in their particular fields of activity, such as youth programs, education, and religious communities. The domestic propaganda in Azerbaijan has an educational character and addresses all layers of its population, not particular communities or individuals. By exercising control over mosques, the Administration of the Caucasus Muslims is able to promote the government's deradicalizing narratives related to Islam, such as a fetwa declaring that the Syrian conflict is not a jihad.[394] It also conducts educational activities and publicizes a monthly magazine promoting traditional Islam. But more importantly, following secular authorities, the Administration of Caucasus Muslims annually congratulates all Azerbaijanis on the occasion of Nowruz—the main state holiday and festival rooted in pre-Islamic polytheism and Zoroastrianism. Since the 16th century, Nowruz has been dear for Shi'as in historical Azerbaijan.[395] Meanwhile, Salafists in Azerbaijan consider it an apostasy. This demonstrates that the Azerbaijani government's deradicalizing narratives are tailored for Azerbaijani audiences and resonate with people who share other narratives of its ideology.

In contrast, in the United States, the State Department's Global Engagement Center, the FBI's Office of Partner Engagement, and DHS's Office of Community Partnerships conduct strategic communications with the aim of countering terrorist propaganda for recruitment and target particular audiences, such as Muslim communities. American policy makers and public opinion are cautious about applying wider government informational activities targeting the domestic population. Even though this situation derives from the religious dissimilarity between

[394] Bayram Balci, Kenan Rovshenoglu, "Shia-Sunni Sectarianism in the Middle East and Its Echo in Azerbaijan," Carnegie Moscow Center, June 27, 2014, https://carnegie.ru/commentary/56032.

[395] Ali Shariati and Mehdi Abedi, *Nowruz*, *Iranian Studies* 19, no. 3–4 (September 1986): 237, https://doi.org/10.1080/00210868608701679.

the United States and Azerbaijan, it also suggests the key reason behind the different application of strategic communication in countering terrorist recruitment propaganda between the countries.

The explanation for this difference in the application of strategic communication is rooted in the ways in which its policies developed in both the United States and Azerbaijan. Strategic communication targeting domestic audiences developed in the United States as an involuntary measure; the freedom of expression continuously restrained its application. The World Wars, Germany's propaganda, the Cold War and Soviet propaganda, and eventually Islamic terrorism forced American administrations to employ propaganda, more recently branded as strategic communication, toward some parts of its population. Therefore, one can fairly call domestic strategic communication in the United States a crisis measure. Even though one can call it a crisis measure in Azerbaijan as well, the perceived existential threat posed to the nation-state made its government's use of domestic propaganda permanent. Azerbaijan tends to brand its domestic propaganda as an educational activity aimed at preserving its population's original identity. Meanwhile, it has become an important tool to mobilize the population for defending its territorial integrity or countering religious radicalization. Moreover, the Constitution of Azerbaijan prohibits religious propaganda "humiliating people's dignity and contradicting the principles of humanism."[396] Accordingly, in Azerbaijan, the government's authority to educate its population in the form of domestic propaganda is natural. Therefore, the difference between both countries is that the United States tailors its strategic communication to particular goals during crises, while Azerbaijan applies its educational propaganda universally.

B. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis in this research highlights some ideas that can improve the Azerbaijani government's use of propaganda targeting domestic audiences in its effort to disrupt radicalization and terrorist recruitment. The research recommends the following to Azerbaijan:

1. Establish a coordinative intergovernmental institution for developing and disseminating propaganda targeting domestic audiences in order to counter religious radicalization. The government of Azerbaijan might consider creating

[396] Portal Azerbaijan.az, "The Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan."

this institution and authorizing it to work with foreign partners, domestic law enforcement, think tanks, and the domestic population. Efforts to counter religious radicalization on a continuous basis may establish the professional elite in the field. It may also contribute to enhancing Azerbaijan's counterterrorism activities.

2. Undertake the elaboration of narratives based on theological knowledge countering the pillars of radicalization for the Azerbaijani context. The government of Azerbaijan might consider elaborating its own definition of radical Islam and attracting local Islamic scholars to work out narratives compromising radical ideas. These narratives have to resonate with the pious Muslims who for some reason do not agree with the traditional Islam in Azerbaijan. Tailoring narratives to specific audiences can make the messages more powerful. Overall, this may help law enforcement in its counterterrorism activities.

3. Apply a transparent community-based educative approach to government propaganda. The government of Azerbaijan might consider engaging its wider population to elaborate and disseminate the narratives countering Islamic radicalization. It might benefit from the experience of DHS in funding projects aimed at the engagement of youth and students in the elaboration of narratives. This may work for increasing people's trust in government domestic propaganda countering terrorist recruitment.

4. Increase the attention given to the deradicalization element of government propaganda in counterterrorism. The government of Azerbaijan might consider widening its narratives of multiculturalism to tailor them to the members of already radicalized communities. Patterns of deradicalization might become narratives per se. Tailoring narratives to family members of radicalized individuals is one of the possible aspects of this recommendation. In addition to that, this approach could mitigate the sense of alienation of radicalized audiences have about the state in Azerbaijan.

Taking into account these recommendations, Azerbaijan could augment its internal capabilities in countering terrorist propaganda for recruitment. The apparent results may be the elaboration of strong narratives and stories resonating with various audiences and thus challenging the appeal of radical propagandists. Strong narratives and well thought-out media campaigns may increase people's awareness of radicalization. In its turn, the general awareness of Azerbaijani society could contribute to family and friends recognizing a target's potential radicalization early and disrupting that progression. While social links sometimes play an important role in an individual's radicalization trusted family and friends may effectively interrupt it in the early stages. At the same time engaging wider domestic communities and enhancing their participation in the fight against radicalization could contribute to the strengthening of civil society in Azerbaijan.

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